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Economic and Social Council

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Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-sixth session
27 February-9 March 2012
Item 2 of the provisional agenda
Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters

Annotated provisional agenda and proposed organization of work*

Provisional agenda

1. Election of officers.
2. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters.
3. Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century":
   (a) Implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives:
      (i) Priority theme: the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges;
      (ii) Review theme: financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women;
   (b) Emerging issues, trends and new approaches to issues affecting the situation of women or equality between women and men: engaging young women and men, and girls and boys, to advance gender equality;
   (c) Gender mainstreaming, situations and programmatic matters.
4. Communications concerning the status of women.
5. Follow-up to Economic and Social Council resolutions and decisions.
6. Provisional agenda for the fifty-seventh session of the Commission.
7. Adoption of the report of the Commission on its fifty-sixth session.

* The proposed organization of work will be issued as E/CN.6/2012/1/Add.1.

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Annotations

1. Election of officers

In accordance with rule 15 of the rules of procedure of the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council and pursuant to Council resolution 1987/21 and decision 2002/234, the Commission on the Status of Women, at the 1st meeting of its fifty-sixth session, on 14 March 2011, elected, by acclamation, Marjon Kamara (Liberia) as Chair, and Irina Velichko (Belarus) and Carlos Enrique García González (El Salvador) as Vice-Chairs of the fifty-sixth and fifty-seventh sessions of the Commission.

Since then, the Latin American and Caribbean States have nominated Carla Teresa Arias Orozco (El Salvador) to replace Carlos Enrique García González (El Salvador) and the Asia-Pacific States have nominated Anne Hernando (Philippines). At the 2nd meeting of its fifty-sixth session, on 27 February 2012, the Commission will be called upon to elect Carla Teresa Arias Orozco (El Salvador) and Anne Hernando (Philippines) as Vice-Chairs. The Commission will also be called upon to elect a Vice-Chair to be nominated by the Western European and other States and to designate one of the Vice-Chairs to act as Rapporteur of the Commission.

In accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 2009/16, the Commission appoints five members to serve two-year terms on the Working Group on Communications on the Status of Women established in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1983/27. At the 1st meeting of its fifty-sixth session, the Commission appointed Li Xiaomei (China) for the Asia-Pacific States and Noa Furman (Israel) for the Western European and other States. The Commission will be called upon to appoint, at its 2nd meeting, on 27 February 2012, the remaining three members of the Working Group to be nominated by the African States, the Eastern European States and the Latin American and Caribbean States, respectively. The nominations will be made with the understanding that upon nomination, the nominees will be permitted to participate fully in the proceedings of the Working Group which is expected to meet a few weeks prior to the opening of the fifty-sixth session of the Commission.

2. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters

Rule 7 of the rules of procedure provides that the Commission, at the beginning of each session, shall adopt the agenda of that session on the basis of the provisional agenda.

The provisional agenda and documentation for the fifty-sixth session of the Commission were approved by the Economic and Social Council in its decision 2011/241.

Preparations for the fifty-sixth session of the Commission were undertaken in accordance with its agreed conclusions 1996/1 on methods of work and Economic and Social Council resolutions 2006/9 and 2009/15. Accordingly, the Bureau of the Commission held several meetings as well as informal briefings and consultations with delegations to consider the organization and methods of work for the session.

Following past practice, statements delivered by representatives of delegations of members and observers of the Commission during general discussions shall be limited to 5 minutes, and statements made on behalf of groups of delegations to

10 minutes. It is also recommended that interventions from non-governmental organizations be integrated into the general debate and the thematic panel discussions, taking into consideration geographical balance.

3. Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

(a) Implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

High-level round table

In its resolution 2006/9, the Economic and Social Council decided that the annual interactive high-level round table would focus on experiences, lessons learned and good practices, including results with supporting data, where available, in relation to the implementation of previous commitments made with regard to the priority theme.

The high-level round table at the fifty-sixth session will focus on "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges".

Documentation

Discussion guide for the high-level round table on the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges: note by the Secretariat (E/CN.6/2012/5)

Priority theme

In its resolution 2009/15, the Economic and Social Council endorsed the Commission's proposed future organization and methods of work. Accordingly, at its fifty-sixth session, the Commission will consider the theme "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges".

Review theme

In accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 2009/15, the Commission will evaluate progress in the implementation of the agreed conclusions from its fifty-second session on financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Documentation

Report of the Secretary-General on the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges (E/CN.6/2012/3)

Report of the Secretary-General on the empowerment of rural women: the role of gender-responsive governance and institutions (E/CN.6/2012/4)

(b) Emerging issues, trends and new approaches to issues affecting the situation of women or equality between women and men: engaging young women and men, and girls and boys

In its resolution 2006/9, the Economic and Social Council requested the Bureau of the Commission, prior to each session, to identify, in consultation with all States, through their regional groups, an emerging issue for consideration by the Commission, taking into account developments at the global and regional levels as well as planned activities within the United Nations, where increased attention to gender perspectives was required.

Following consultation, the Bureau decided that the Commission would hold an interactive expert panel on the emerging issue of engaging young women and men, and girls and boys, in advancing gender equality.

(c) Gender mainstreaming, situations and programmatic matters

Report of the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

In accordance with paragraph 67 (c) of General Assembly resolution 64/289, the Commission will have before it the annual report of the head of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) on the normative aspects of the work of UN-Women and on its implementation of the policy guidance provided by the Commission.

Situation of and assistance to Palestinian women

In its resolution 2011/18 on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women, the Economic and Social Council requested the Commission to continue to monitor and take action with regard to the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, in particular paragraph 260 concerning Palestinian women and children, the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. It also requested the Secretary-General to continue to review the situation, to assist Palestinian women by all available means and to submit to the Commission at its fifty-sixth session a report, including information provided by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, on the progress made in the implementation of the resolution.

Release of women and children taken hostage, including those subsequently imprisoned, in armed conflicts

In its resolution 54/3, the Commission requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Commission at its fifty-sixth session a report on the implementation of the resolution, including relevant practical recommendations, taking into account the information provided by States and relevant international organizations.

Ending female genital mutilation

In its resolution 54/7, the Commission requested the Secretary-General to report to it at its fifty-sixth session on the implementation of the resolution, using information provided by Member States and verifiable information provided by organizations and bodies of the United Nations system and by non-governmental organizations,

with a view to assessing the impact of the resolution on the well-being of women and girls.

Eliminating maternal mortality and morbidity through the empowerment of women

In its resolution 54/5, the Commission on the Status of Women requested the Secretary-General to provide a report to the Commission at its fifty-sixth session on actions to strengthen linkages among programmes, initiatives and activities throughout the United Nations system for gender equality, the empowerment of women and girls, the protection of all human rights and elimination of preventable maternal mortality and morbidity.

Women's economic empowerment

In its resolution 54/4, the Commission on the Status of Women requested the Secretary-General to submit a report to the Commission on the implementation of the resolution at its fifty-sixth session.

Women, the girl child and HIV and AIDS

In its resolution 55/2, the Commission requested the Secretary-General to report to the fifty-sixth session on the implementation of the resolution, with an emphasis on accelerated actions taken in regard to women, the girl child and HIV and AIDS, and with a view to assessing the impact of the resolution on the well-being of women and the girl child.

Joint workplan on the human rights of women

In accordance with resolution 39/5 of the Commission on the Status of Women, resolution 1997/43 of the Commission on Human Rights and resolution 6/30 of the Human Rights Council, the Commission on the Status of Women will have before it a report on the joint workplan of UN-Women and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Violence against women

In its resolution 50/166 on the role of the United Nations Development Fund for Women in eliminating violence against women, the General Assembly requested the Fund to include in its regular reports information on the establishment of a trust fund in support of national, regional and international actions to eliminate violence against women and to provide such information to the Commission on the Status of Women.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

In accordance with article 21.2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the reports of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women are transmitted to the Commission for information. The report of the Committee on its forty-sixth, forty-seventh and forty-eighth sessions (A/66/38) will be before the Commission. A note by the Secretariat transmitting the results of the Committee's forty-ninth and fiftieth sessions will also be before the Commission.

Programme matters

The Commission will have before it for its consideration a note by the Secretary-General on the preparation of the strategic framework for the period 2014-2015. The Commission is invited to review the proposed biennial programme plan for gender equality and the empowerment of women and provide its comments to the Secretary-General. The proposed biennial programme plan, modified as appropriate, will be submitted to the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its fifty-second session. Its recommendations thereon will be transmitted to the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session when it considers the proposed strategic framework of the Secretary-General for the biennium 2014-2015.

Documentation

Report of the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director of UN-Women to the Commission on the Status of Women (E/CN.6/2012/2)

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women (E/CN.6/2012/6)

Report of the Secretary-General on the release of women and children taken hostage, including those subsequently imprisoned, in armed conflicts (E/CN.6/2012/7)

Report of the Secretary-General on ending female genital mutilation (E/CN.6/2012/8)

Report of the Secretary-General on eliminating maternal mortality and morbidity through the empowerment of women (E/CN.6/2012/9)

Report of the Secretary-General on the economic empowerment of women (E/CN.6/2012/10)

Report of the Secretary-General on women, the girl child and HIV and AIDS (E/CN.6/2012/11)

Report of the Secretary-General on the joint workplan of the United Nations Entity on Gender Equality and the Advancement of Women and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (A/HRC/19/31-E/CN.6/2012/12)

Note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report of the United Nations Entity on Gender Equality and the Advancement of Women on the activities of the United Nations Trust Fund in support of Actions to Eliminate Violence against Women (A/HRC/19/30-E/CN.6/2012/13)

Note by the Secretary-General on the preparation of the strategic framework for the period 2014-2015 (E/CN.6/2012/CRP.2)

Documents for information

Report of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on its forty-sixth, forty-seventh and forty-eighth sessions (A/66/38)

Note by the Secretariat transmitting the results of the forty-ninth and fiftieth sessions of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (E/CN.6/2012/CRP.1)

4. Communications concerning the status of women

In its resolution 76 (V), the Economic and Social Council established a procedure by which the Commission would receive and consider communications relating to the status of women. In its resolution 304 I (XI), the Council amended resolution 76 (V) and requested the Secretary-General to compile, before each session of the Commission, a list of confidential and non-confidential communications, containing a brief indication of the substance of each communication.

In its resolution 1983/27, the Council reaffirmed the mandate of the Commission to consider confidential and non-confidential communications on the status of women and authorized the Commission to appoint a working group to consider such communications and prepare a report thereon for the Commission.

In its resolution 1993/11, the Council reaffirmed that the Commission was empowered to make recommendations to the Council on what action should be taken on emerging trends and patterns of discrimination against women revealed by such communications.

In its decision 2002/235, the Council decided, in order to make the communications procedure of the Commission more effective and efficient:

(a) That the Commission, starting at its forty-seventh session, should appoint, at each session, the members of the Working Group on Communications on the Status of Women for the next session so that the members would be able to meet to enable the Secretariat to issue their report three working days before the adoption of the agenda by the Commission;

(b) To request the Secretary-General:

(i) To inform Governments about each communication pertaining to them that would be considered by the Commission and give them at least 12 weeks before the consideration of such communications by the Working Group;

(ii) To ensure that the members of the Working Group receive in advance the lists of communications, including replies from Governments, if any, to be taken into account in preparing its report for examination by the Commission.

In its resolution 2009/16, the Economic and Social Council decided that the Commission, starting at its fifty-fourth session, should appoint the members of the Working Group on Communications on the Status of Women for a two-year period.

Documentation

Note by the Secretary-General transmitting the list of confidential communications concerning the status of women (E/CN.6/2012/SW/ COMM.LIST/46/R and Add.1)

5. Follow-up to Economic and Social Council resolutions and decisions

The Commission will have before it a letter from the President of the Economic and Social Council on follow-up to the Council's policy recommendations.

In accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 2001/27, functional commissions are invited to provide concise, action-oriented input to the Council's annual high-level segment. At its 2012 annual ministerial review, the Council will consider the theme "Promoting productive capacity, employment and decent work to

eradicate poverty in the context of inclusive, sustainable and equitable economic growth at all levels for achieving the Millennium Development Goals". The Commission will have before it a note by the Secretariat concerning the Commission's input to the 2012 annual ministerial review.

Documentation

Letter dated 21 November 2011 from the President of the Economic and Social Council to the Chair of the Commission on the Status of Women (E/CN.6/2012/14)

Note by the Secretariat on promoting productive capacity, employment and decent work to eradicate poverty in the context of inclusive, sustainable and equitable economic growth at all levels for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (E/CN.6/2012/15)

6. Provisional agenda for the fifty-seventh session of the Commission

In accordance with rule 9 of the rules of procedure of the functional commissions of the Council, the Commission will have before it a draft provisional agenda for its fifty-seventh session, including the list of documents to be submitted for its consideration.

7. Adoption of the report of the Commission on its fifty-sixth session

In accordance with rule 37 of the rules of procedure of the functional commissions of the Council, the Commission shall submit to the Council a report on the work of its fifty-sixth session.

Annex

Membership of the Commission on the Status of Women at its fifty-sixth session (2012)

(45 members; four-year term)

Membership	*Term expires at close of session in the year*
Argentina	2014
Bangladesh	2014
Belarus	2013
Belgium	2015
Central African Republic	2014
China	2012
Colombia	2013
Comoros	2014
Cuba	2012
Democratic Republic of the Congo	2015
Dominican Republic	2012
El Salvador	2014
Eritrea	2012
Estonia	2015
Gambia	2014
Georgia	2015
Germany	2013
Guinea	2013
Haiti	2012
India	2012
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	2015
Iraq	2013
Israel	2013
Italy	2013

Membership	*Term expires at close of session in the year*
Jamaica	2015
Japan	2013
Liberia	2015
Libya	2014
Malaysia	2014
Mauritania	2013
Mongolia	2014
Netherlands	2015
Nicaragua	2013
Philippines	2014
Republic of Korea	2014
Russian Federation	2012
Rwanda	2013
Senegal	2012
Spain	2015
Swaziland	2014
Sweden	2012
Thailand	2015
United States of America	2012
Uruguay	2014
Zimbabwe	2015

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Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-sixth session
27 February-9 March 2012
Item 2 of the provisional agenda*
Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters

Proposed organization of work

Date/time	*Agenda item*		*Programme*
Monday, 27 February			
10 a.m.	Item 1	Election of officers	
	Item 2	Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters	
	Item 3	Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"	Opening statements Introduction of reports General discussion
1 p.m.			Deadline for inscription on the list of speakers for the general discussion
3 p.m.	Item 3 (a) (i)	Implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: priority theme: the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges	High-level round table on experiences, lessons learned and good practices, including results with supporting data, where available, in relation to the implementation of previous commitments made in regard to the priority theme (in two parallel meetings)

* E/CN.6/2012/1.

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Date/time	*Agenda item*		*Programme*
Tuesday, 28 February			
10 a.m.	Item 3 (a) (i) (*continued*)		Interactive expert panel on key policy initiatives and capacity-building for gender mainstreaming: the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges Focus: economic empowerment of rural women
	Item 3 (c)	Gender mainstreaming, situations and programmatic matters	
3 p.m.	Item 3 (*continued*)		General discussion
Wednesday, 29 February			
10 a.m.	Item 3 (*continued*)		General discussion
1.15-2.30 p.m.			Preparatory panel for 2013: elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls
3 p.m.	Item 3 (a) (i) and (c) (*continued*)		Interactive expert panel on key policy initiatives and capacity-building for gender mainstreaming: the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges Focus: the role of gender-responsive governance and institutions for the empowerment of rural women
Thursday, 1 March			
10 a.m.	Item 3 (a) (ii)	Implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: review theme: financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women	Interactive dialogue to evaluate progress in the implementation of the agreed conclusions on financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women Focus: national experiences in implementing the agreed conclusions on financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women

Date/time	*Agenda item*		*Programme*
3 p.m.	Item 3 (a) (ii) (*continued*)		Interactive dialogue to evaluate progress in the implementation of the agreed conclusions on financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women Focus: progress in financing for gender equality from the perspective of international organizations and multilateral development partners
Friday, 5 March			
10 a.m.	Item 3 (a) (i) (*continued*)		Agreed conclusions (informal consultations)
3 p.m.	Item 3 (a) (i) (*continued*)		Agreed conclusions (informal consultations)
Monday, 5 March			
10 a.m.	Item 3 (*continued*)		General discussion
10 a.m. (*in parallel*)	Item 3 (a) (i) (*continued*)		Agreed conclusions (informal consultations)
3 p.m.	Item 3 (*continued*)		General discussion (concludes)
3 p.m. (*in parallel*)	Item 3 (a) (i) (*continued*)		Agreed conclusions (informal consultations)
Tuesday, 6 March			
10 a.m.	Item 3 (b)	Emerging issues, trends and new approaches to issues affecting the situation of women or equality between women and men	Interactive expert panel discussion on the emerging issue of engaging young women and men, and girls and boys, to advance gender equality
3 p.m.			Deadline for submission of draft proposals
3 p.m.	Item 3 (a) (i) (*continued*)		Agreed conclusions (informal consultations)

Date/time	*Agenda item*		*Programme*
Wednesday, 7 March			
10 a.m. to 12 noon			Celebration of International Women's Day
12 noon	Item 3 (a) (i) (*continued*)		Agreed conclusions (informal consultations)
3 p.m.	Item 4	Communications concerning the status of women	Closed meeting to consider the report of the Working Group on Communications on the Status of Women
	Item 3 (a) (i) (*continued*)		Agreed conclusions (informal consultations)
Thursday, 8 March			
10 a.m.	Item 5	Follow-up to Economic and Social Council resolutions and decisions	Introduction and discussion Introduction of draft proposals
10 a.m. (*in parallel*)	Item 3 (a) (i) (*continued*)		Agreed conclusions (informal consultations)
3 p.m.	Item 3 (a) (i) (*continued*)		Agreed conclusions (informal consultations)
Friday, 9 March			
10 a.m.	Item 3 (*continued*)		Action on draft proposals
3 p.m.	Item 3 (*continued*)		Action on draft proposals
	Item 6	Provisional agenda of the fifty-seventh session of the Commission	Adoption of the provisional agenda of the fifty-seventh session of the Commission
	Item 7	Adoption of the report of the Commission on its fifty-sixth session	Adoption of the report Closure of the fifty-sixth session

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Fifty-sixth session
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Item 3 of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Normative aspects of the work of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

Report of the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

Summary

The report summarizes the normative aspects of the Entity's work, in particular its support for gender-specific intergovernmental processes and efforts to increase attention to gender equality aspects in sectoral intergovernmental processes.

* E/CN.6/2012/1.

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I. Introduction

1. By paragraph 49 of its resolution 64/289, the General Assembly established the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). By paragraph 67 (c) of the same resolution, the Assembly requested the head of UN-Women to submit to the Commission on the Status of Women an annual report on the normative aspects of the Entity's work and on its implementation of the policy guidance provided by the Commission. The present report is submitted in accordance with that request.

II. Strengthening the institutional foundations for delivering on the normative aspects of UN-Women's work

2. In December 2010, UN-Women reported to the Commission at its fifty-fifth session on the planned strategic direction and the necessary administrative and institutional changes to consolidate the previous four offices[1] into a dynamic and innovative structure to implement all the functions entrusted to it by the General Assembly (E/CN.6/2011/2). Since then, UN-Women has articulated its vision, mission and thematic priorities, and significant progress has been made to ensure that the Entity can fully discharge its responsibilities and meet the demands of Member States, the United Nations system and other stakeholders towards the accelerated realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women. UN-Women reported on those efforts to the General Assembly at its sixty-sixth session (see A/66/120) with a focus on progress in regard to the governance of the Entity; administration and human resources; financing; and transitional arrangements. The Executive Director of UN-Women submitted an annual report on operational activities for the consideration of the Executive Board (see UNW/2012/1), in accordance with paragraph 67 (d) of resolution 64/289. That report is expected to be considered by the Board at its first regular session, to be held on 24 and 25 January 2012.[2]

3. Since UN-Women brings together the mandates and functions of the four previous entities engaged in the field of gender equality and the empowerment of women, with an additional coordinating role (see paragraphs 49 and 53 of resolution 64/289), its strategic orientation and procedures have been geared to supporting an integrated approach to delivering concrete results in three functional areas, namely (a) expanding demand-driven support to Member States at the national level, in line with national priorities; (b) supporting intergovernmental processes to strengthen the global policy and normative framework for gender equality and its implementation on the ground; and (c) leading, coordinating and promoting the accountability of the United Nations system in its work on gender equality and the empowerment of women.

[1] The Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and the Division for the Advancement of Women of the Secretariat, the United Nations Development Fund for Women and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women.

[2] The report gives an overview of UN-Women's operational activities in thematic areas.

4. By its decision 2011/3 of 30 June 2011, the Executive Board endorsed the strategic plan of UN-Women for 2011-2013 (see UNW/2011/9 and UNW/2011/13), which is being implemented. The strategic plan provides the framework and direction for the support extended by UN-Women to Member States; its partnerships with women's organizations and networks, other civil society organizations, academia and experts, the mass media and the private sector; and its efforts to build institutional capacity to undertake the functions laid out in its founding resolution.

5. UN-Women's normative support function is an integral part of its strategic plan for 2011-2013, one of whose six goals is to support the development of a comprehensive set of global norms, policies and standards on gender equality and women's empowerment that is dynamic, responds to new and emerging issues, challenges and opportunities and provides a firm basis for action by Governments and other stakeholders at all levels. This goal has two main aspects, namely, UN-Women's support for intergovernmental processes focused specifically on gender equality and the empowerment of women and its promotion of the inclusion of a gender perspective in sectoral or thematic intergovernmental processes. A third aspect highlights the feedback loop that ensures that UN-Women brings back to the intergovernmental debates the experiences gained and lessons learned through its operational activities.

6. By its decision 2011/5 of 7 December 2011, the Executive Board approved UN-Women's institutional budget for 2012-2013 (see UNW/2011/11, 12 and 13), which will enable the Entity to achieve results through high-quality technical expertise, leveraging resources, partnerships, brokering knowledge, advocacy and influence, and building capacity, and thus to contribute to changing the lives of women and girls on the ground. The General Assembly is expected to adopt the proposed programme budget for UN-Women for 2012-2013 (assessed contribution) before the end of 2011.

7. In the course of 2011, UN-Women worked strategically and proactively to enhance outcomes on gender equality and the empowerment of women in intergovernmental processes. Key objectives included the efficient delivery of critical support and forward-looking recommendations to intergovernmental discussions, as well as the leveraging of such discussions to help shape a results-oriented and actionable agenda for gender equality and the empowerment of women. These efforts have resulted in greater coherence between the normative support UN-Women provides to normative processes and its operational support to partners at the national level in the implementation of these outcomes. Translating these mutually supportive mandates and functions into concrete changes for women and girls is a principal task which UN-Women is working to achieve.

III. UN-Women support to normative intergovernmental processes and implementation of policy guidance

8. The establishment of UN-Women as a composite entity has strengthened capacity to provide support beyond the gender-specific intergovernmental processes to sectoral intergovernmental processes where a gender perspective can be strengthened, as well as to provide support in the implementation of the resulting policy and normative framework at country level. With the successful conduct of the fifty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women in February and

March 2011, UN-Women has smoothly assumed its responsibilities of supporting intergovernmental normative processes and has since continued to exercise this function throughout the intergovernmental calendar year. In these efforts, UN-Women has focused on adding value, through research and analysis and forward-looking policy recommendations, and on facilitating intergovernmental discussions and consensus-building and the strengthening of the normative framework for gender equality and women's empowerment. UN-Women has also focused on contributing to closing the implementation gap between global commitments and women's daily realities through its follow-up of intergovernmental outcomes.

Commission on the Status of Women

9. The Commission on the Status of Women, as the principal global policymaking body dedicated exclusively to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment and advancement of women, provides policy guidance in a range of sectoral areas. The Commission's guidance has helped to deepen discussions across intergovernmental bodies as well as guided implementation on the ground. In early 2011, UN-Women supported the fifty-fifth session of the Commission, which resulted, among other outcomes, in a set of agreed conclusions on access and participation of women and girls in education, training and science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work (see E/2011/27, chap I, sect. A). These agreed conclusions expand the global normative framework in a number of key areas, including national legislation, policies and programmes; access to and participation in education; gender-sensitive quality education and training, including in the field of science and technology; the transition from education to full employment and decent work; increasing the retention and progression of women in science and technology employment; and making science and technology responsive to women's needs. Follow-up work to implement these agreed conclusions is now under way by relevant stakeholders.

10. The session attracted large numbers of participants from Governments, including many ministers and other senior officials, as well as representatives from non-governmental organizations and the United Nations system. United Nations entities and Member States convened some 60 parallel events and there were well over 200 events organized by non-governmental organizations. These numbers and events confirmed the Commission's central role as a primary intergovernmental body for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, as a catalyst for gender mainstreaming and as a key platform for networking and exchanges of experience among all stakeholders. UN-Women used the occasion to bring together stakeholders from around the world and to build new as well as strengthen existing partnerships that contribute to achieving results for women. These partnerships are an integral part of UN-Women's efforts at the national level in the follow-up to and implementation of the recommendations that emanated from the session.

11. To provide substantive inputs for the fifty-sixth session of the Commission, UN-Women convened an expert group meeting on enabling rural women's economic empowerment in Accra from 20 to 23 September 2011. UN-Women prepared the documentation for the session with a particular focus on supporting the Commission in consolidating and expanding intergovernmental policy guidance that targets this

particular group of women. The Entity's outreach to civil society groups aims to increase their contribution to and involvement in the session and to establish a strong basis for follow-up. In particular, UN-Women coordinates the participation of non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council in the session. The Entity supports the bureau of the Commission in its responsibilities. It will extend its full support to the Commission in its deliberations. UN-Women will play an active role in efforts to implement the results of the session on the ground, including through its support to Member States and its coordination role across the United Nations system.

Economic and Social Council

12. UN-Women's engagement with the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of July 2011 focused on two aspects, namely the Council's role in regard to gender mainstreaming and operational activities. In both areas, UN-Women created opportunities for moving forward key elements of its own mandate, especially as they pertain to its coordination function and efforts to create a positive feedback loop between its normative support function and its operational activities. Specifically, UN-Women prepared the mandated report for the Economic and Social Council on mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system (E/2011/114). The report assessed progress in mainstreaming gender perspectives at the country level, especially through the United Nations Development Assistance Framework process. It also provided new insights into advances made in terms of United Nations staff capacity development for gender mainstreaming.

13. The Council's resolution on the topic (resolution 2011/6) provides clear guidance and reinforces UN-Women's coordination function in relation to the entities of the United Nations system. Accordingly, UN-Women is working through global coordination mechanisms,[3] including the United Nations Development Group, to ensure that system-wide policy decisions and recommendations on gender equality and the empowerment of women are implemented at regional and country levels.

14. UN-Women also made a substantive contribution to the Secretary-General's report on the role of the United Nations system in implementing the internationally agreed development goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and the empowerment of women (E/2011/85), which covered the implementation of the ministerial declaration adopted by the Economic and Social Council in 2010. The report identified ways in which the United Nations system could strengthen its capacity to ensure coordinated action, with UN-Women in the leadership role, and reviewed progress made by the United Nations system on cross-cutting issues. Together with the 2010 ministerial declaration, the Council's resolution on the topic (resolution 2011/5) provides strong guidance for follow-up work by UN-Women and the entities of the United Nations system that will contribute to closing the implementation gap between commitments and women's daily realities.

[3] The United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination and its three pillars: the High-level Committee on Programmes, the High-level Committee on Management and the United Nations Development Group.

15. In its 2010 ministerial declaration, the Council recognized the continuing need for efforts to tackle discriminatory attitudes and gender stereotypes which perpetuate discrimination against women and stereotypic roles of men and women. A similar finding had emanated from the Secretary-General's 15-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action[4] (E/CN.6/2012/2). In order to assist intergovernmental processes in moving forward the policy agenda on this topic, UN-Women joined forces with other entities in a panel discussion during the Council's 2011 coordination segment that identified opportunities for action by different stakeholders. The urgency of effective policy responses to gender stereotypes informs the work of UN-Women in a range of areas, including the elimination of violence against women and women's participation in decision-making. A panel discussion on "Leadership, coordination and accountability: evaluating the United Nations system's work on gender equality and women's empowerment" flagged progress as well as continuing challenges in ensuring that gender equality was achieved through the organizations' work as well as the system's coordination mechanisms and efforts. The participation of the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director of UN-Women and senior officials from several other entities (the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund and the World Health Organization) sent a clear signal of the system's commitment to moving forward in partnership.

General Assembly

16. At its sixty-sixth session, the General Assembly discussed the advancement and empowerment of women in the Second and Third Committees. The biennial debate in the Second Committee on women in development is a critical catalytic occasion for highlighting the gender aspects of the sectoral issues that are considered by that Committee and identifying key areas where attention to gender perspectives needs to move forward. The Third Committee reviews a number of thematic questions to advance the gender equality agenda. In the reports prepared to support deliberations,[5] and based on lessons learned from its own activities on the ground, together with the experiences of Member States and entities of the United Nations system, UN-Women was able to flag areas where further progress is needed, add value to the discussions and propose recommendations that proved useful in negotiation processes and outcomes on issues as diverse as gender-responsive budgeting and support for women migrant workers.

17. The resolutions adopted by the General Assembly further expand, deepen and strengthen the global policy framework for the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment in the areas they cover. Together with other entities of the United Nations system, UN-Women will contribute to their implementation within

[4] See *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annex I.

[5] Reports of the Secretary-General on strengthening the institutional arrangements for support of gender equality and the empowerment of women (A/66/120); integrating a gender perspective into national development strategies (A/66/219); improvement of the situation of women in rural areas (A/66/181); violence against women migrant workers (A/66/212); and measures taken and progress achieved in follow-up to and implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (A/66/211).

its mandate and areas of responsibility. Some examples of UN-Women's contribution to follow-up and implementation are provided in the following paragraphs.

18. UN-Women's efforts to strengthen women's economic empowerment, working in partnership with other entities of the United Nations system, responds to demand and is in line with detailed and multifaceted policy guidance. In particular, this area of work contributes directly to enhancing women's role in development — the topic of one of the resolutions of the General Assembly. Aware of the particular needs of women in least developed countries, UN-Women organized a number of special events to advocate for the inclusion of gender equality and women's empowerment considerations in the outcome document of the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, held in Istanbul, Turkey from 9 to 13 May 2011. UN-Women has taken on the responsibility of coordinating the United Nations system in the implementation of the recommendations focusing on gender equality and women's empowerment. UN-Women has also committed itself to providing support to all least developed countries on the basis of national demand and priorities, with a focus on the economic empowerment of women and the needs of women in poor rural areas.[6] The comprehensive preparations for, and outcome on, the priority theme of the Commission on the Status of Women at its fifty-sixth session will give further impetus to this work, including through UN-Women's partnering with key United Nations entities such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the World Food Programme in the lead-up to the session and in coordinating a system-wide response.

19. Another area of focus to strengthen women's economic empowerment pertains to women migrant workers, an issue which has received consistent attention from the General Assembly (most recently in resolution 66/128) and where UN-Women has ongoing and proposed work in several regions, including Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean and the Commonwealth of Independent States. Recently, the Entity has forged a strong partnership with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Organization for Migration to support the ratification and implementation of the new ILO Convention Concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers. A Caribbean-wide network of domestic workers' organizations and their support groups has been launched to advance this agenda. The Entity continues to provide technical support on gender equality, migration and development, especially as they concern care workers, to the Global Forum on Migration and Development. At the same time, UN-Women supports the development and implementation of gender-sensitive policies, legislation, action plans and front-line services on health-care information and access and safe and efficient transfer of remittances and their productive investment for women migrant workers, especially domestic workers, and strengthens capacities of women migrant workers' organizations to access entitlements.

20. In response to an increase in demand across all regions, UN-Women is consolidating and expanding its work in support of women's leadership and participation in all areas of the political process and other areas of civic engagement. This area of work is aligned with Millennium Development Goal 3 and

[6] See also E/CN.6/2012/10 (women's economic empowerment) and E/CN.6/2012/3 and 4 (priority theme).

resolutions emanating from intergovernmental processes that have highlighted the importance of women's full and equal representation in public life and decision-making, especially the most recent resolution of the General Assembly, resolution 66/130. To further this agenda, UN-Women co-sponsored a high-level side event on women's political participation in conjunction with the general debate at the sixty-sixth session of the General Assembly, on 19 September 2011. The Joint Statement on Advancing Women's Political Participation, together with resolution 66/130, will provide further impetus to this work. Recent initiatives include UN-Women's technical assistance to several countries in the Middle East and North Africa and the development of a series of programmes to ensure that women are at the table during transition processes and that their interests and concerns are addressed. UN-Women also stepped up its efforts to ensure adherence to gender equality commitments in electoral assistance provided by the United Nations, through inter-agency mechanisms and in partnership with the Department of Political Affairs of the Secretariat, UNDP and other entities.[7]

Security Council

21. In October 2011, the Security Council held its annual open debate on women and peace and security, which this time focused on the theme of women's participation and role in conflict resolution and mediation. UN-Women prepared the Secretary-General's report (S/2011/598) through an inter-agency consultative process. Successive Security Council resolutions and presidential statements guide the global and United Nations system-wide efforts to enhance women's role in conflict resolution and prevention. UN-Women, in particular, seeks to support Member States in the implementation of policy commitments pertaining to women's needs during and after conflict and to ensure that women are empowered to participate as key actors in conflict prevention and resolution and long-term peacebuilding.

22. UN-Women's programming efforts aim to channel resources and technical assistance to support gender-responsive reforms in community security systems, peacekeeper training, post-conflict planning, transitional justice, mediation and public service delivery. UN-Women also supports advocacy to ensure that women have access to leadership opportunities in conflict resolution and leads coordination and policy analysis on women and peace and security. One example of this work, focused on gender equality and mediation, is the strategy jointly developed by UN-Women and the Department of Political Affairs to bring women and their concerns to the peace table. The strategy includes support for institutional and policy change; capacity-building at both the national and local levels; knowledge sharing; and fostering partnerships and women's peace coalitions. In 2011, UN-Women supported advocacy efforts and training of Ivorian women during the post-electoral crisis and development of a regional training series on mediation, bringing together 32 high-level women leaders from across the West African region. It also provided support to women's peace committees in Central Asia and the southern Caucasus, including training for over 70 civil society leaders.

23. UN-Women's normative support to the above-mentioned intergovernmental processes benefited from its regional, subregional and country presences. The

[7] See A/66/314.

experiences, lessons learned and knowledge generated through the Entity's operational activities and support provided to stakeholders on the ground has informed and enriched its research and analysis, as well as the recommendations submitted for consideration by intergovernmental bodies. In this way, UN-Women's operational work feeds back directly into the normative support work.

Sectoral and thematic intergovernmental processes and other processes

24. The establishment of UN-Women has been the impetus for deepening engagement with sectoral intergovernmental processes in an effort to promote the inclusion of gender perspectives in analysis, discussions, results and follow-up. During 2011, UN-Women strategically targeted three major United Nations intergovernmental processes and a global event on aid effectiveness to promote attention to gender equality issues that could be leveraged for results on the ground.

25. UN-Women worked to increase the visibility of gender equality issues at the high-level meeting on AIDS held at United Nations Headquarters in June 2011. This work draws from UN-Women's operational activities. As a member of the UNAIDS Inter-agency Working Group on Gender and HIV, UN-Women supported the preparatory process by providing relevant analysis on the gender dimensions of HIV and AIDS. UN-Women facilitated the participation of civil society organizations in the meeting, particularly representatives of HIV-positive women's organizations, organizations of caregivers and women's organizations active in the field of HIV and AIDS. As a member of the Global Coalition on Women and AIDS, UN-Women supported the collection and compilation of inputs from over 80 civil society organizations through a virtual consultation and co-organized an event to present the findings and priorities identified by women themselves as being central to the HIV response. Finally, UN-Women supported the participation of HIV-positive women's organizations and networks in Government delegations to the high-level meeting.

26. In the Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS (General Assembly resolution 65/277, annex) resulting from the meeting, Member States acknowledge that women's empowerment and gender equality are fundamental for reducing the vulnerability of women to HIV, and pledged to eliminate gender inequalities and gender-based abuse and violence, as well as increase the capacity of women and adolescent girls to protect themselves from the risk of HIV infection.

27. UN-Women invested significant efforts to promote the inclusion of gender perspectives in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change negotiations. UN-Women aims to be a catalyst for ensuring that the institutional arrangements for implementation of the 2010 Cancun Agreements and climate finance mechanisms that are still under negotiation are gender-responsive, and that commitments to gender equality and women's rights are mainstreamed in the intergovernmental work towards an agreement on a post-2012 framework to address the global challenge of climate change. UN-Women provided technical support to delegations upon request, including identifying possible entry points for attention to gender equality issues. In collaboration with the International Organization of la Francophonie, UN-Women developed a guidance note on gender equality issues and climate change for francophone Member States.

28. UN-Women worked closely with other United Nations entities and civil society organizations, including the Global Gender and Climate Alliance, on advocacy and awareness-raising initiatives. As part of these efforts, UN-Women participated in several side events at the seventeenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in Durban, South Africa, from 28 November to 9 December 2011, and supported the issuance of a stakeholders' daily newsletter that highlighted the views of gender equality advocates. The resolution of the Commission on the Status of Women at its fifty-fifth session had created a strong basis and much-needed impetus for such advocacy and follow-up.

29. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development will take place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 20 to 22 June 2012. UN-Women participates in United Nations system-wide coordination mechanisms for the Conference, such as the High-level Committee on Programmes and the United Nations Development Group, and has made a substantive contribution to the compilation document that will serve as a basis for the preparation of a zero-draft of the outcome document. Guided by the recommendations that emanated from the panel discussion on gender equality and sustainable development held during the fifty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women,[8] UN-Women is working with United Nations system-wide focal points for non-governmental organizations to facilitate the involvement and participation of women's organizations in the process. The Entity is also preparing four substantive papers[9] to increase the knowledge base on gender equality issues in the context of sustainable development. To attract further attention to gender equality and women's empowerment at the Conference, UN-Women is organizing a high-level women's leadership forum in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme.

30. UN-Women engaged strategically with the Fourth High-level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, held in Busan, Republic of Korea, from 29 November to 1 December 2011, in an effort to deepen understanding of and action on gender equality considerations. In preparation for the Forum, UN-Women convened national and regional consultations to mobilize government partners and civil society organizations around gender equality issues and their relevance to aid effectiveness. In particular, the Entity's high-level meeting held in Rwanda in July 2011 was instrumental in identifying key recommendations aimed at ensuring a positive outcome in Busan with regard to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. UN-Women also played a key role in drawing attention to the optional module on gender equality that was included for the first time in the Paris Declaration monitoring framework, and provided technical and strategic advice to countries completing the questionnaire.

31. During the Forum, UN-Women and the Network on Gender Equality of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development co-organized a side event and took part in the special session on gender equality that was held on the first day of the Forum. UN-Women's country

[8] See the moderator's summary, E/CN.6/2011/CRP.7, on www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/55sess.htm#panel4.

[9] These papers focus on a green economy; the institutional framework for sustainable development; progress made in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, Agenda 21 and the Millennium Development Goals; and the three pillars of sustainable development.

and regional offices provided guidance and support to stakeholders to ensure effective participation of representatives of women's organizations in the Busan Global Civil Society Forum. UN-Women also supported the convening of a women's forum as part of the Civil Society Forum, which provided space for highlighting women's key demands. The consideration by the Commission on the Status of Women of its review theme on financing for gender equality at its fifty-sixth session can serve to maintain the momentum and to give further impetus for strengthening gender equality results on the ground.

32. UN-Women actively supported a number of other processes that contribute to strengthening the global normative and policy framework for gender equality. It supported the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in the development of a new general recommendation on the protection of women's rights in conflict and post-conflict situations. In addition to providing technical support, UN-Women highlighted key experiences from its own work during the Committee's day of general discussion on 18 July 2011. UN-Women has continued to support States parties, as well as civil society actors, in the preparation of reports under article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, as well as in the implementation of the Committee's concluding observations, through technical and financial support, multi-stakeholder training and capacity-building workshops, "mock sessions", the development of implementation plans and other activities.

33. The Working Group on discrimination against women in law and practice, established by the Human Rights Council in resolution 15/23 of 2010 for an initial period of three years, is to work in close coordination with UN-Women, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Commission on the Status of Women and other United Nations entities. UN-Women is helping the Working Group to address its priority themes, namely public life and citizenship; economic life including dimensions of social and cultural life; family life; health and safety; and violence against women. There are significant synergies between the work of the Working Group and that of UN-Women, in particular the Entity's support for intergovernmental processes and the assistance it provides to countries around the world in regard to legal reform. This collaboration contributes in a very practical way to strengthening the links between normative frameworks and women's daily realities.

34. UN-Women is an active member of the United Nations task force preparing for the 20-year review of the implementation of the programme of action of the International Conference on Population and Development, scheduled for 2014. The Entity will contribute to the review process at the national as well as global levels.

V. Conclusion

35. UN-Women proactively and successfully supported gender-specific intergovernmental processes to help move forward the global gender equality agenda. The Entity also engaged strategically with sectoral processes in an effort to enhance gender equality outcomes. In these engagements, UN-Women links its normative support function with its operational experience and expertise. In particular, UN-Women is moving to implement the normative guidance of intergovernmental bodies, for example in areas such as women's economic

empowerment and participation in public life. Priority emphasis is placed on supporting the work of Member States, in intergovernmental bodies, to further refine and expand the normative framework, as well as on helping to close the implementation gap between Member States' policy commitments and women's daily realities.

36. Given the inextricable link between these two areas of its work, UN-Women proposes to prepare a single consolidated report responding to the mandates of paragraphs 67 (c) and 67 (d) of General Assembly resolution 64/289, and to have that report presented to both the Commission on the Status of Women and the Executive Board of UN-Women.

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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The report provides an overview of the situation of women and girls in rural areas, examines the global context and points out how advancing rural women's and girls' empowerment contributes to rural development and food security. It discusses rural women's access to resources (land, finance, extension, information and technology) and markets, employment and decent work, and social protection. It discusses their contribution to unpaid care work, how service provision can reduce the burden of such work, and their role in sustainable development. The report concludes with a set of recommendations for consideration by the Commission on the Status of Women.

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I. Introduction

1. In accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 2009/15, the Commission on the Status of Women at its fifty-sixth session will consider as its priority theme "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges". The present report covers the economic empowerment of rural women and another report (E/CN.6/2012/4) addresses gender-responsive governance systems and institutions. The report on women's economic empowerment (E/CN.6/2012/10) examines the macroeconomic policy environment and analyses the situation of women as workers and decision makers. It is recommended that the three reports be read together for a full overview of challenges faced by rural women.

2. The present report draws on the findings of the expert group meeting on "Enabling rural women's economic empowerment: institutions, opportunities and participation", organized by UN-Women, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP), held from 20 to 23 September 2011 in Accra. It incorporates analysis and examples provided by Member States and United Nations entities.[1] It concludes with recommendations for the Commission to consider.

II. The situation of women in rural areas

3. Agriculture provides a livelihood for 86 per cent of rural women and men and employment for about 1.3 billion smallholder farmers and landless workers in developing countries;[2] 43 per cent of them are women.[3] Women are active in all agricultural sectors and much of their work is unpaid. In developing countries, rural women are primarily responsible for cultivating food crops and vegetables and managing small animals (see A/66/181, para. 13). In 2008, women represented approximately 12 per cent of the labour force in the fishery sector,[3] primarily concentrated in subsistence and small-scale commercial fishing but also in artisanal and industrial fisheries at the processing and marketing stages. In forestry, women tend to work in low-end jobs and they contribute to agroforestry, watershed management, tree improvement, forest protection and management within their communities. An estimated two thirds of the 400 million poor livestock keepers worldwide are women.[4]

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[1] Contributions were received from the Governments of Cameroon, Colombia, Denmark, Djibouti, Estonia, Fiji, Finland, Germany, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Mauritius, New Zealand, Serbia, South Africa, the Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, the Syrian Arab Republic, Timor-Leste and Ukraine. The following United Nations entities provided inputs: the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, FAO, IFAD, the International Labour Office (ILO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

[2] www.fao-ilo.org/ilo-dec-employ/en/?no_cache=1.

[3] www.fao.org/docrep/013/i2050e/i2050e02.pdf.

[4] FAO, "The role of women in agriculture", ESA Working Paper No. 11-02, March 2011.

4. Rural women and men are generally involved in multiple activities simultaneously — smallholder farming, agricultural and non-agricultural wage labour and self-employment — to secure their livelihoods. They may have to change jobs, depending on the season, or may remain unemployed or underemployed for periods of time.[5] Income from non-farm activities accounts for approximately 42 per cent of household income in Africa, 40 per cent in Latin America and 32 per cent in Asia.[6]

5. Poverty remains a massive and predominantly rural phenomenon; 70 per cent of the developing world's 1.4 billion extremely poor live in rural areas. Sub-Saharan Africa is home to nearly a third of that number, while South Asia is now home to about half.[7] In the recently enlarged European Union, more than half of the population lives in rural areas and in some countries poverty is predominantly rural. In Albania, for example, almost 90 per cent of the poor live in rural areas. In Canada and the United States of America, 14 per cent of the rural population is poor, the most vulnerable being female-headed households, children and ethnic minorities.[8]

6. Global and regional data show serious urban/rural discrepancies as a result of poor service delivery in rural areas and rural underdevelopment. Rural women's heavy workload on the farm and in the household limits their time and energy for tending to children and for preparing nutritious family meals and weaning foods.[9] In developing regions, child malnutrition is twice as common in rural areas as in urban areas; children under five are more at risk of dying in rural than in urban households; and rural children are twice as likely to be out of school compared to urban children, with a wider gender gap in rural areas. Eight out of 10 people without access to an improved drinking water source live in rural areas.[10]

7. Maternal mortality is the highest where the numbers of skilled health personnel are the lowest — in rural sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Oceania, particularly in poorer and less educated communities.[10] About 1,000 women die from pregnancy- or childbirth-related complications around the world every day and 99 per cent of all maternal deaths occur in developing countries. Women giving birth in urban areas are twice as likely to be attended by skilled health workers as women in rural areas.[11]

8. Rural women are not a homogeneous group and their circumstances vary according to their access to productive assets, their capabilities, their opportunities and the extent to which they have a voice. For instance, HIV/AIDS-affected rural communities are usually composed of larger numbers of sick adults and orphans and vulnerable children, which disproportionately increases the burden of care for rural women and girls. The dramatic labour force shortage in such communities threatens agricultural production, rural livelihoods and food security and puts more pressure

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[5] FAO, IFAD and ILO, *Gender Dimensions of Agricultural and Rural Employment: Differentiated Pathways out of Poverty: Status, Trends and Gaps* (Rome, 2010).

[6] FAO, *Promoting Farm/Non-farm Linkages in Developing Countries: Case Studies from Africa and Latin America* (Rome, 2002).

[7] IFAD, *Rural Poverty Report 2011* (Rome, 2010).

[8] www.ruralpovertyportal.org.

[9] N.O. Onofiok and D.O. Nnanyelugo, "Weaning foods in West Africa: nutritional problems and possible solutions", *Food and Nutrition Bulletin*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 1998.

[10] United Nations, *The Millennium Development Goals Report*, 2010 and 2011.

[11] United Nations Children's Fund, *The State of the World's Children 2009*.

on women's and girls' time. Rural widows are at a greater risk of losing their productive assets, such as land. Minority women or lower-caste or lower-class women usually have even less access than other rural women to health care, education and decision-making power. FAO data for 20 countries show that rural female-headed households tend to be poorer than male-headed households. However, rural women heads of household who receive male support through remittances or social networks are better off.

9. Women living in remote areas are isolated by their lack of access to public transport, communication technologies, information and institutions. Extreme weather conditions, poor road infrastructure, tight seasonal work schedules and gender norms may limit their physical mobility. They may lack the support system necessary to obtain immediate assistance when their rights are violated, for instance in abusive relationships. They may stay home to ensure the safety of the livestock and other household assets. While they carry out most of the community management roles, such as organizing social events, men are more engaged in community political roles.

10. Rural women hold much of the knowledge needed to increase food security, prevent environmental degradation and maintain agricultural biodiversity. They are custodians and users of traditional knowledge, including on climate resilience, and managers of seeds, and often rely on native plants, including medicinal plants, and native food varieties and practices for their sustenance, health and well-being.

11. Indigenous women's livelihood strategies are closely tied to the environment and are highly dependent on access to land, territory and resources. Their cultures and knowledge systems are often closely related to their traditional occupations, for example handicrafts, community-based industries, hunting, fishing, trapping, shifting cultivation or gathering. However, there is increased pressure on their lands and resources and many indigenous peoples are fighting for their rights over ancestral domains. Food security and women's livelihoods are central to these struggles.

12. Rural girls suffer from gender-based discrimination. Rural girls face greater pressure than their urban peers to adhere to traditional practices and customs. Early marriage and early pregnancy limit their social networks and education opportunities and expose them to greater reproductive health risks. In rural areas of the developing world, excluding China, 45 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 are married or in unions before the age of 18, compared to 22 per cent of urban women. The unpaid work burden for rural girls is especially heavy.

13. The situation of women in rural areas is challenging. While they can increase their autonomy and power within their fam lies and communities through a variety of means — education, an independent income, new responsibilities following the migration of a spouse, asset inheritance and participation in community decision-making processes — their opportunities are always limited by the broader development context and sometimes by specific local factors, such as isolation and remoteness (for further discussion of women's collective action and participation in decision-making processes, see E/CN.6/2012/4).

III. Neglect of agriculture and the food crisis

14. The primary factors constraining women's economic empowerment are structural and deeply rooted. They include the global context of agricultural production and trade, emerging global demographic trends, increased competition for natural resources, and national agricultural and rural development policies. In many developing countries, investment in the production of agricultural exports has dominated agricultural policies to the detriment of investment in production for local markets.

15. Volatile food prices, increased competition for resources, climate change and environmental degradation are deleterious for both developing and industrialized countries. The least developed countries are usually unable to afford insurance and other measures that mitigate price- or weather-related shocks. Slow recovery from the financial and economic crisis is impeding rural development in many countries and threatening economic development, political stability, peace and security around the world. The latest severe drought and famine in the Horn of Africa highlight the urgent need to address the underlying causes of the food crisis.

16. According to FAO, in 2010, 925 million people were chronically hungry; of them, 60 per cent were women (E/2007/71, para. 14).[1] Major spikes in the prices of rice, wheat and maize in 2008 led to large increases in the number of people going hungry and falling into poverty. Between 130 million and 155 million people in developing countries fell into extreme poverty in 2007 and 2008 owing to the food and fuel price hikes.[12] Food price volatility has a disproportionate impact on poor consumers and on poor smallholder farmers, the majority of whom are women, who are less likely to invest in measures to raise productivity during periods of unpredictable price changes.[13]

17. Food security can be enhanced if gender inequalities are systematically addressed in rural development and agricultural policies. FAO estimates that the productivity gains from ensuring women's equal access to fertilizers, seeds and tools could raise total agricultural output in developing countries by an estimated 2.5 to 4 per cent, thereby reducing the number of hungry people by between 100 million and 150 million.[14]

18. International prices for most agricultural commodities are predicted to remain at 2010 levels or higher at least for the next decade, making it more difficult to achieve global food security and nutrition goals.[15] Targeted safety-net mechanisms and emergency food reserves can reduce the negative consequences of high prices for poor women and men, and collective action can help smallholder farmers benefit from them.

19. Agricultural growth, especially of smallholder agriculture, contributes to improved food security and benefits people with low incomes, who spend a large proportion of their income on food. It can contribute to the eradication of hunger, to

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[12] International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and World Bank, *Global Economic Prospects 2009: commodities at the Crossroads* (Washington, D.C., 2009).

[13] FAO, *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2011: How does International Price Volatility affect Domestic Economies and Food Security?* (Rome, 2011).

[14] FAO, *The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-11: Women in Agriculture: Closing the Gender Gap for Development* (Rome, 2011).

[15] *OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook 2011-2020.*

rural development and to gender equality and the empowerment of women.[16] It is estimated that gross domestic product (GDP) growth founded on agriculture is at least twice as effective in reducing poverty as GDP growth originating from outside agriculture.[17] Agricultural growth in many countries has suffered as a result of years of policy neglect and underinvestment.

20. The renewed international attention, including from new constituencies, to the agricultural sector provides an opportunity to increase recognition of and support to rural women and girls. In 2003, in the African Union Declaration on Food Security in Africa, African Heads of State and Government committed themselves to allocating at least 10 per cent of their national budgets to agricultural development. In 2009, the G8 Summit adopted the L'Aquila Food Security Initiative and mobilized pledges of over US$ 22 billion to reverse the decline of investment in agriculture and improve food security.[18] The international community contributed US$ 7.5 billion in official development assistance to rural development and the agricultural sector in 2008 and 2009. However, the focus on gender equality and women's empowerment remains limited. According to Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee data, only 3 per cent of that amount was allocated to programmes in which gender equality was a principal objective, and only 32 per cent to those in which gender equality was a secondary objective.

21. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), to be held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 2012, provides another opportunity to strengthen attention to rural women's and girls' contributions to sustainable development and to increase their engagement in policymaking processes. Climate finance offers further opportunities to support rural women's food production systems. At the fifteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, in December 2009, industrialized countries pledged US$ 30 billion for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to the effects of climate change for the period 2010-2012 and committed themselves to mobilizing long-term finance of a further US$ 100 billion annually by 2020.[19]

22. The World Trade Organization trade negotiations on agriculture provide a forum for the discussion of issues such as market access, the elimination of export and domestic subsidies, tariffs and non-tariff barriers, and special and differential treatment for developing countries. Following the failure of the Uruguay Round to reach an agreement on these issues, the 2001 Doha Round provided avenues for addressing rural development and food security concerns of developing countries.

23. Empowering rural women and girls is an essential part of the solution to some of today's most serious global challenges: food security, poverty reduction and sustainable development. Their agency is critical to secure higher rates of agricultural growth and enhanced food security, reduce the intergenerational

[16] World Bank, *World Development Report 2008: Agriculture for Development* (Washington, D.C., 2007); and Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011-2020 (A/CONF.219/3/Rev.1).

[17] World Bank, *World Development Report 2008*, op. cit.

[18] *Musjoka Accountability Report: Assessing Action and Results against Development-related Commitments*, 2010.

[19] http://unfccc.int/meetings/copenhagen_dec_2009/meeting/6295.php.

transmission of poverty and manage land and rural resources in a sustainable manner.

IV. Access to productive resources and markets

24. Securing women's legal rights to land and other property and access to markets is an indispensable component of their economic empowerment and often the basis for sustainable food production. Global data illustrate that women have equal property ownership rights in 115 countries and have equal inheritance rights in 93 countries.[20] However, gender disparities in land holdings are discernible in all regions. When women do have access to land, through marriage, inheritance, land reform programmes and land markets, it is often of poorer quality than the land that men have access to and control.[21] Cultural norms and traditions and discriminatory formal and informal laws often restrict, exclude or unfavourably affect rural women's access to and control over land, finance, extension services, information and new technologies.[22] In some countries, Government policies and legislative reforms concerning inheritance and marriage can increase women's ability to gain access to and control resources.

25. In many countries, common grazing lands, forests and rivers are of significant value to poorer households and indigenous groups, in particular women, who rely on them for fuel, food, fodder and as sources of income.[23] While both women and men have user rights, control often remains with senior men in the community. Women's limited access to land means that they tend to own fewer and smaller animals. While women are as successful as men in generating income from animals, as food production becomes commercialized, decisions and income tend to shift to men, and women's small-scale businesses are crowded out and women may be forced to take employment on other farmers' land.

26. Increased competition for resources, partly stemming from a growing market for land and urban expansion, has had an adverse impact on developing countries. Where governance is poor and legal protection for local communities and smallholder farmers is weak, women are subject to discrimination. Land acquisitions by domestic and foreign investors, in particular in Africa and South-East Asia, have increased demand for water, and the pollution of surface and groundwater has created imbalances between biofuel and food production and restricted the land available to local communities for food production.

27. The ability to access land has direct consequences for the welfare and development of many children living in rural areas, whose food security and nutrition are often dependent on it. In some developing countries there is evidence that the nutrition of smaller children, as they transition from breast milk to solid foods, is particularly dependent on women's and girls' time availability and can suffer when the demand for agricultural labour is high. In countries where women

[20] UN-Women, *Progress of the World's Women 2011-12: In Pursuit of Justice*.

[21] *The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-11*, op. cit.

[22] See OECD, "Gender inequality and the MDGs: what are the missing dimensions?", September 2010.

[23] United Nations, *2009 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Women's Control over Economic Resources and Access to Financial Resources, including Microfinance* (New York, 2009).

lack land ownership rights or access to credit there are, on average, 60 per cent and 85 per cent more malnourished children, respectively.[24]

28. Land reform can address gender inequalities in land and property holdings and progress has been made in ensuring that women have equal rights.[25] Government capacity at the local and national levels needs to be built up to strengthen existing laws, introduce new reforms and strengthen implementation. Public officials posted to remote rural areas may be unaware of the laws and their duties to implement them. Rural women and men often have limited awareness of their rights and limited access to legal aid and appeal mechanisms, which prevents them from exercising their rights.

29. Countries in southern Africa have improved land administration by recruiting more women and by decentralizing law enforcement offices, making them more accessible to poor women and men.[26] Putting women into leadership positions in Tajikistan increased women's registrations of dekhan farms from 2 to 14 per cent between 2002 and 2008.

30. National land titling can help secure women's rights when registration requires women to register their titles alone or when both spouses' names are required. For example, in India stamp duty rates were cut from 8 to 6 per cent for property registered by women and to 7 per cent for property jointly registered by husband and wife (A/64/93, para. 194). However, titling can also formalize inequality by fixing land distributions where they were earlier flexible and negotiable through customary law.[25] In Africa, land-titling projects have led to the individualization of rights to land, trees and water and, as a result, the exclusion of those who previously had user rights through customary law, often poor women (ibid., para. 191).

31. Access to financial services (credit, savings, insurance and remittance transfer services) is critical for rural women's economic empowerment. However, women have less access to financial services than men. For example, in rural sub-Saharan Africa, women hold less than 10 per cent of the credit available to smallholder agriculture. A number of institutional and socio-economic and cultural barriers — lack of collateral, limited financial skills and time, limited mobility and access to transportation — restrict women's access to financial services. In parts of South Asia, landless women have been able to lease or purchase land as groups for joint cultivation as a result of targeted credit subsidies by Governments.

32. Microfinance institutions have increased women's access to finance and are developing approaches to meet the specific needs of rural women. The Grameen Bank in Bangladesh makes long-term loans for land and housing conditional on their registration in the woman's name, leading to improved security for women, decreased divorce and abandonment of women, and improved repayment rates. A microfinance programme supporting women's savings and credit groups in northern Mozambique is built on the local tradition of saving to overcome gender barriers to microfinance. An IFAD-supported savings scheme in Peru targeted groups of rural

[24] OECD, "Gender inequality and the MDGs", op. cit.

[25] Rao Nitya, "Women's access to land: an Asian perspective", paper prepared for the expert group meeting on "Enabling rural women's economic empowerment: institutions, opportunities and participation", Accra, 20-23 September 2011.

[26] International Land Coalition and Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies, "Securing women's access to land: linking research and action. An overview of action-research projects in Southern Africa", Synthesis Report No. 15, March 2011.

women, provided them with financial education and training, and matched their savings over four years with grants. The response was vast, with 5,000 more accounts opened than expected. Innovative financial literacy tools for business plans and loans have been developed and are being used by women's groups in India, the Sudan and Uganda.[27]

33. Advances in technology, such as computerized services, automated teller machines (ATMs), and mobile banking, make financial service delivery less dependent on expensive infrastructure and facilitate reaching rural and remote areas. In Brazil, India, Kenya, the Philippines and South Africa, financial institutions have reached rural women customers at a low cost by providing their services through post offices, petrol stations and stores.[28] Ekgaon Technologies has created an innovative platform to enable rural women in Tamil Nadu, India, to access financial information and services from the Government and national banks through Short Message Service (SMS) mobile banking.

34. Agriculture extension services provide information about new technologies, plant varieties and market opportunities, usually for commercially marketed crops. Current data show that only 5 per cent of agricultural extension services are provided to women farmers.[29] There is a large unmet demand for extension services that respond to women farmers' needs, for example on locally used and marketed crops like millet, cassava and sorghum. Targeting client services to women farmers in Nicaragua led to a 600 per cent increase in women service users. Extension services also need to encompass indigenous and traditional agricultural and biotechnical knowledge and new technologies. Many poor women have complex practical understanding of agro-biodiversity, fisheries, horticulture, forestry and health.[30]

35. Woman-to-woman training has boosted both subsistence production and household food security in Honduras. Women's active engagement in cooperatives, seed banks and seed exchange fairs has contributed to increased food security in many communities. For example, a Nepalese farmers' organization with 90 per cent women members was established in response to the rapid decline in local rice varieties. Since 2003, it has established a seed storage facility where it conserves 80 traditional varieties of rice.[31] The effective introduction and uptake of new technologies require women's participation at the early stages of technology development and local adaptation. Moroccan women's participation in the improvement of olive oil technology and production methods boosted their production and earnings.

36. Promoting women's access to processing facilities, distribution and transport has proved successful in a number of countries. It has helped women tomato farmers in South Africa to produce and sell tomato products to retail supermarkets

[27] IFAD, "Gender and rural microfinance: reaching and empowering women; a guide for practitioners", 2009.

[28] World Bank, *World Development Report 2008*, op. cit.

[29] www.fao.org/worldfoodsummit/english/fsheets/women.pdf.

[30] Report of the expert group meeting on "Enabling rural women's economic empowerment: institutions, opportunities and participation", held from 20 to 23 September 2011 in Accra (forthcoming).

[31] UNDP, "Intellectual property, agrobiodiversity and gender considerations: issues and case studies from the Andean and South Asian regions", Policy Paper, September 2010.

throughout the country. Women's access to cassava processing equipment and enhanced access to information technology in Nigeria resulted in their increased productivity and increased market visibility and market share.

37. The spread of cost-effective information and communication technologies (ICTs) to rural areas allows women access to information to improve agricultural productivity and increase enterprise returns. In Uganda, ICTs have facilitated women farmers' interaction with other parts of the country and in Mali they have helped women market their products. Women fish processors in Benin use video, television and mobile phones to learn new fish preservation techniques and to sell their produce in Togo and Nigeria. In Italy, a web community "YOURuralNET" has allowed women farm managers to share and exchange their knowledge, experiences and good practices.

38. Despite the high food prices on the global market, small-scale producers in many countries have been unable to reap the benefits, in part owing to their limited access to markets but also to the high transaction costs typical for small economic units.[32] Agricultural cooperatives have enabled smallholder farmers to pool resources and realize economies of scale. In Tajikistan, women's producer groups have benefited from organized marketing strategies for their cashmere, wool and mohair products, access to the North American market and joint strategies for entering the European market. In some countries, through the FAO/IFAD/WFP Purchase for Progress Initiative, smallholder farmers have linked up with schools, hospitals and other public institutions and programmes to sell their produce.

39. Helping women access niche markets for high-value and brand-marketed products, including fair trade and certified organic products, expands their economic opportunities and income and responds to increased consumer demand for fresh and organic produce. Organic "women's coffee" has been successfully introduced by associations of women farmers in Rwanda. In Fiji, women are engaged in the cultivation of seaweed and pearls, and the innovative production of virgin coconut oil. In the Syrian Arab Republic, training for women has been focused on the making of perfume, cheese and other dairy products and on the use of plants for medicinal purposes.

V. Rural employment and decent work

40. The informal nature much rural employment, poor or absent work standards and rights, poor implementation of national legislation and regulations, and social institutions shape women's work in rural areas. For example, the average female to male ratio of contributing family workers is almost double in countries where women lack rights to own land, than in those where women have equal rights to land.[33] Where a relatively small share of the population works for a wage, women are less likely to do so than men and are more likely to be employed in part-time, seasonal, low-paying jobs than men. Rural women often face gender-based

[32] FAO and IFAD, *Good Practices in Building Innovative Rural Institutions to Increase Food Security* (forthcoming).

[33] J. Jütting and C. Morrisson, "Women and bad jobs, what can 'SIGI' tell us?", Paper presented at the FAO-IFAD-ILO workshop on gaps, trends and current research in gender dimensions of agricultural and rural employment: differentiated pathways out of poverty, Rome, 31 March-2 April 2009.

discrimination, including sexual harassment, and have limited to non-existent rights as pregnant women and mothers.[30]

41. Evidence suggests that women's ability to diversify away from agriculture could provide an effective pathway out of poverty in some countries.[34] Women's engagement in activities outside the farm has also proven to improve their self-esteem and self-reliance, and the respect in which they are held in the community and employment in large-scale export-oriented crop production and agro-processing may provide better working conditions and wages than traditional agricultural employment.

42. Social protection systems in some countries have contributed to safeguarding a minimum level of access to essential services and income security for all citizens, and to preventing them from falling permanently into poverty. In China, the Minimum Living Standards Scheme, initially restricted to urban areas, now covers 46 million beneficiaries in rural areas. The Government aims to achieve full rural pension coverage by 2020.[35]

43. Evidence from middle- and low-income countries shows that access to social security is closely linked to reductions in poverty and inequality. By enhancing rural women's income security and access to essential services, social protection floors can increase rural women's access to education and labour market participation.[35] Social protection floors are affordable even in severely resource-constrained countries, as shown in studies by ILO, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, UNICEF, WHO and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. A solid but modest social protection floor can grow progressively with increased levels of economic development.[36]

44. Employment guarantee and public works programmes are provided either on a permanent basis or as temporary measures in times of economic or other crisis. In India, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act has provided employment in infrastructure to unskilled and unemployed women and men from 52 million rural and poor households.[37] In South Africa, it is aimed to scale up the Expanded Public Works Programme from 500,000 work opportunities in 2009 to 1.5 million in 2014. The Programme is innovative in that it also focuses on job creation in the social sector, for example in the areas of childhood development, home-based care and the upgrading of other community services.

45. Other employment creation programmes aim to help rural women gain the skills they need to obtain employment in the formal sector or to own businesses. In Peru, public competitions are used to identify successful poor women farmers for public funding and technical assistance to enable them to expand their businesses. Home-employed rural women in Uzbekistan are helped to develop marketing plans

[34] FAO, IFAD and ILO, *Gender Dimensions of Agricultural and Rural Development: Differentiated Pathways out of Poverty. Status, Trends and Gaps* (Rome, 2010).

[35] ILO, *Social Protection Floor for a Fair and Inclusive Globalization*, Report of the Social Protection Floor Advisory Group chaired by Michelle Bachelet and convened by ILO in collaboration with WHO (Geneva, 2011).

[36] Rania Antonopoulos, "Social protection: opportunities for promoting a gender equality agenda", UNDP Policy Brief (forthcoming).

[37] See additional examples in UNDP, "Employment guarantee policies", Policy Brief Issue 02, Gender Equality and Poverty Reduction Series, April 2010.

using on-line retailers and designer boutiques. In Nepal, some 34,170 women have established microenterprises as a result of UNDP-sponsored enterprise development training. A recent impact evaluation concluded that women who have participated in this training earn five times more than those who did not participate.

46. Conditional cash transfer programmes, in both rural and urban areas, respond to the increasing demand for assistance to poor families hardest hit by the global crises, and target poor and excluded groups often living outside the reach of social insurance. Conditions attached, such as regular school attendance or basic preventive health care, have the aim of halting the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Lessons learned from cash transfers to some 110 million people in Latin America are that well-designed and targeted programmes can help increase the food consumption and school enrolment of girls. In Brazil, the Bolsa Familia programme is the largest conditional cash transfer programme in the developing world, reaching over 46 million people, with 93 per cent of the payments made going to women as the legally responsible beneficiaries.[38] A joint non-governmental organization/commercial bank programme established mobile ATMs in rural areas of Malawi, allowing thousands of rural women to access cash transfers using smart cards.

47. Rural-to-urban or international migration is sometimes the only viable option for rural women. Lack of economic opportunities, cultural practices and violence against women, authoritarian systems of family and community control, and family pressures are drivers of women's migration. In middle- and high-income countries, declining birth rates, ageing populations, combined with women's increasing public employment, and lack of State-provided child and elder care, have created a demand for local or overseas migrant workers, such as domestic workers.

48. Temporary, circular or permanent migration can empower women.[39] Many migrant women, especially those in higher-skilled occupations, benefit from cultural exchange and exposure to new ideas, skills, attitudes and knowledge, and develop independence and self-confidence. Their roles as financial providers or managers of remittances have enabled many of them to enjoy greater status and decision-making power within their households and communities, transforming relationships between women and men. Male out-migration can also present opportunities for changing gender stereotypes, as women have to take on additional roles and tasks traditionally carried out by men.

49. However, migrant women face risks, discrimination, exploitation and abuse at all stages of migration. Their greater lack of access to information, education and training heighten their susceptibility to unscrupulous recruiters and traffickers, debt bondage, fewer legal and decent jobs for women, and higher social and personal costs for women returnees.[39] Working in an isolated and poorly regulated space, women domestic workers remain overworked, underpaid and unprotected, and there are widely reported cases of abuse of domestic workers. Despite these constraints, migrant women send remittances regularly and consistently remit a larger proportion of their earnings than men. For example, Bangladeshi women working in the Middle

[38] Kathy Lindert and others, "The nuts and bolts of Brazil's Bolsa Familia Program: implementing conditional cash transfers in a decentralized context", SP Discussion Paper No. 0709 (World Bank, 2007).

[39] United Nations, *2004 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Women and International Migration* (New York, 2006).

East send home 72 per cent of their earnings on average.[40] However, in their home communities, they often face social pressure and stigmatization, as migrating on their own, making independent decisions, developing networks and earning a higher income may appear inappropriate in some cultures.

50. Women also tend to be the major recipients of remittances, either because their needs are higher or because they are seen as better managers and investors in household or community well-being. Women, including poor rural women, who migrate as domestic workers often return home to start up small businesses, such as auto-rickshaw rental businesses in Nepal, tour guide businesses and diving equipment shops in the Caribbean, and small grocery stores in Africa. In the Philippines, women have been able to purchase farmland and invest in agricultural technology. However, findings suggest that most of the remitted money is spent on consumption and not necessarily for productive purposes.[41] Incentives for investment in the local economy need to be provided to remittance-receiving households by commercial banks, along with targeted financial and non-financial advice to women migrant workers.

VI. Unpaid care work and access to services

51. Much of rural women's and girls' time is spent working in unpaid activities. Gender norms and work roles prevailing in rural societies assign women and girls a wide range of responsibilities, from domestic tasks such as caring for children, collecting water and firewood, cooking meals, processing and storing food to providing unpaid work on family farms for subsistence agriculture or cash crop production. FAO reports that poor rural women can work as many as 16 to 18 hours per day, doing fieldwork as well as handling all their domestic responsibilities.[42] However, little value is placed on the unpaid care work[43] of rural women. It is usually invisible in national accounting systems and unrecognized in policymaking, planning, resource allocation and service provision.

52. The burden of unpaid care work is enormous. Globally there are 884 million people without safe drinking water, 1.6 billion people without reliable sources of energy, 1 billion people who lack access to roads, 2.6 billion people without satisfactory sanitation facilities, and 2.7 billion people who rely on open fires and traditional cooking stoves.

53. The pressure of balancing unpaid care work with agricultural production undermines the ability of rural women to engage in paid work. In rural Africa, women often walk 10 miles or more every day to fetch water and in the dry season it is not uncommon for women to walk twice that distance. Most tasks are performed manually and are physically exhausting and time consuming. Rural women and girls

[40] United Nations Population Fund, *State of World Population 2006: A Passage to Hope: Women and International Migration*, p. 29 (New York, 2006).

[41] Ralph Chami and others, *Macroeconomic Consequences of Remittances* (IMF, Washington, D.C., 2008).

[42] www.fao.org/docrep/w9990e/w9990e10.htm.

[43] Unpaid care work includes both personal and health care and care-related activities (e.g. fetching water and firewood, cooking, cleaning and washing cloths). See also UNDP, *Unpaid Care Work*, Policy Brief, Gender Equality and Poverty Reduction Series, Issue 01, October 2009.

are responsible for a disproportionate share of the household's transport but generally have less access to the available means of transport than men and boys, since they are frequently controlled by men and women's ability to pay for transportation is often limited.

54. Some 2,000 rural villages in West Africa have benefited from the creation of multifunction platforms (i.e., locally generated energy services). They have helped reduce women's daily work by two to four hours, increased women's incomes, improved education and enrolment and retention rates and increased adult literacy rates. Clean and fuel-efficient cooking stoves can reduce women's and children's domestic work burden; it is estimated that one improved stove requires 50 per cent less biomass fuel than a traditional stove.[44]

55. Women's groups in rural and remote areas are working to meet their communities' water and energy needs through renewable energy sources like solar power and biogas. In Nicaragua and Uganda, women-lead initiatives have resulted in the use of solar power for business activities, for accessing information and for extra study time for boys and girls. In Nicaragua, women have opened a restaurant serving "solar food" prepared using solar energy. The Barefoot College of India and UN-Women support rural and illiterate grandmothers to become effective and self-sufficient solar engineers.

56. Time- and labour-saving processing methods and technologies for both household and agricultural use, and nutrition and weaning education programmes can help improve the quality of family diets and traditional weaning foods. In the Philippines, such programmes led to a reduction in the prevalence of malnutrition from 64 to 42 per cent.[9]

57. The provision of parental leave and care services for children, the elderly and the sick can help parents to better balance their work and family responsibilities. The Government of Italy has given this issue a primary role in its implementation of structural and rural development policies. In New Zealand, paid parental leave has been extended to cover self-employed parents, which is particularly beneficial to rural women.

58. To address poor local service delivery, some countries have invested in women's community centres that provide comprehensive services to women. In Kyrgyzstan, Mauritius, the Republic of Moldova and Uzbekistan, these centres provide social services, support for land registration and capacity-building programmes, including for employment and small business development. In Georgia, internally displaced women and line ministries have come together to address the specific challenges faced by those women in a comprehensive manner.

59. Services provided by mobile units can provide access for hard to reach rural populations. Mobile health units are used to respond in emergency and humanitarian situations and also to reach seasonal field workers. In the Donetsk province of Ukraine, a network of family planning services with 10 clinics and 17 mobile advisory units has helped address the reproductive health-care needs of rural women.

[44] Global Village Energy Partnership International, *Cookstoves and Markets: Experiences, Successes and Opportunities* (2009).

60. Solutions to combat women's illiteracy and children's school drop-out include targeted literacy and non-formal education opportunities in Bedouin villages in Jordan and rural villages in Cambodia, and the use of mobile phones in Pakistan. UNESCO is working with teachers to build up their basic information and communications technology skills and information literacy in South Africa in order to service rural areas better. IFAD has developed an inter-household mentoring programme in Uganda that targets poorer rural households. Single mothers in rural Timor-Leste were provided with subsidies through the Bolsa da Mãe (mother's purse) programme, enabling them to send their children to school.

VII. Sustainable development

61. Climate change, environmental degradation and climate shocks, including drought, desertification, deforestation, natural disasters, toxic waste and pollution, have contributed to the additional strains faced by women and men smallholder farmers and have exacerbated food insecurity.

62. Rural women are powerful agents and participants in sustainable development who can implement sustainable solutions to address the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation. For example, women in Fiji are adopting new eco-friendly farming methods and women in Kenya and Zimbabwe are protecting and planting indigenous and medicinal trees, and establishing bee populations in arid areas and learning how to maintain them sustainably. Women in Benin have adopted environmentally sustainable methods of oyster harvesting while reforesting a lagoon on which communities depend for their livelihoods. In Ecuador, UN-Women works with indigenous women's groups to ensure their involvement in the sustainable conservation and management of the natural and cultural heritage of the Yasuní Biosphere Reserve.

63. Rural women and men have the potential to contribute fully and substantively to natural resource and environmental management, conservation, protection and rehabilitation, as leaders and participants in policy formulation and decision-making institutions. They have much to contribute to designing and implementing rural infrastructure investments, for example in public transportation, water and sanitation, renewable energy and locally developed or adapted environmentally sound "green" technologies. For example, in Nepal, the Women's Environment Preservation Committee manages 963 tons of waste per year that supports 40 waste-fed biogas plants to meet local communities' demand for renewable energy.

64. The current system for promoting sustainable development is fragmented at all levels and requires immediate institutional reform to promote enhanced policy coherence and coordination in the areas of social and economic development and environmental protection, the prioritization of financial resources towards poverty reduction, equality and rural development, and the effective implementation and scaling-up of good practices. Rural women and men should be at the centre of a pro-poor and inclusive reform process.

VIII. Conclusions and recommendations

65. **Policy frameworks at the national level need to be redefined to provide an enabling environment with the right incentives for rural development. Global decision-making forums, including international trade machinery and other international frameworks for global policymaking and coordination, need to provide the wider policy environment to support those national policy frameworks. Countries, especially the least developed countries, need protection from the adverse consequences of global shocks and crises.**

66. **Rural women's and girls' work contributes to agricultural output, food security and rural development and so to national economic growth and development. Their mainly unpaid labour services are essential to ensure that children, the elderly and the vulnerable are nurtured and cared for. The returns from their paid and unpaid work in rural settings are a critical determinant of the intergenerational transmission of poverty.**

67. **Rural women and girls face gender-specific constraints, for example lack of access to productive resources, such as land, finance, information, extension services and technology. Cultural norms, care responsibilities and security issues mean that women and girls face more difficulties than their male counterparts in gaining access to local and national markets and institutions. Inadequate investment in the provision of services to rural areas constrains women's productivity in agriculture, exacerbates their burden of unpaid care work and limits their opportunities to earn independent incomes.**

68. **Rural development and agricultural growth are thus constrained by the inability of women and girls to fully realize their potential as economic agents in the paid and unpaid economies. For the least developed countries, it is important that pledges made at L'Aquila are honoured and that gender analysis is applied in the allocation of aid.**

69. **It is clear that women's agency is part of the solution in overcoming development challenges, including in regard to poverty, food security and environmental sustainability. But in order for that to happen, and to be sustained, rural women's and girls' leadership needs to be supported and resourced. Further, the structural factors that deepen inequalities between rural women and men need to be addressed and action taken to eliminate the discrimination faced by rural women.**

70. **Member States, United Nations entities and civil society, including women's groups and rural organizations and the private sector, have taken measures to improve rural women's and girls' access to productive inputs and services. They have taken steps to recognize and reduce women's burden of unpaid care work and to promote farm and off-farm employment, market opportunities and sustainable development.**

71. **Fully funded, coherent, systematic and strategic policies for rural women's and girls' economic empowerment are needed, instead of the ad hoc approaches that often typify current policies.**

72. **The Commission on the Status of Women may wish to call on Governments and other stakeholders to compile and share examples of good practice and lessons learned in promoting gender equality and women's**

economic empowerment in rural areas, with a view to replicating and scaling up successes, and, as appropriate, to take action as follows:

Food security and investment in agriculture

(a) To ensure that rural women are central to discussions on and equal beneficiaries of current and future financial pledges and allocations for agriculture, rural development and improved food security, and to consider earmarking resources for rural women's economic empowerment;

(b) To invest in improvements to subsistence farming, while expanding women smallholder farmers' opportunities to diversify their production and increase their productivity by engaging in commercial farming and accessing wider and more lucrative high-value product markets;

Access to resources, employment opportunities and markets

(c) To expand opportunities for wage employment, both on- and off-farm, for landless and land-poor women and men;

(d) To establish a minimum social protection floor to secure rural women's access to essential services and income security;

(e) To eliminate all discrimination against rural women and girls under statutory law, including in relation to land and natural resources, family and marriage law, inheritance provisions and housing law, and to raise awareness on rural women's rights;

(f) To develop registration processes for land tenure that are local, inexpensive, rapid, transparent and accessible to women;

(g) To increase rural women's access to financial services, including by designing targeted financial products and providing access to financial literacy training;

(h) To support women smallholder farmers by providing them with agricultural extension services, grain storage, infrastructure, transportation, information and technologies, and access to agricultural inputs;

(i) To develop well-functioning markets through transparent information, fair prices, sound infrastructure and proper regulation, and to provide remote access to up-to-date market pricing information;

(j) To develop innovative partnerships to accelerate women farmers' engagement in value chains and to help bring their products closer to national and international markets;

(k) To take advantage of technological innovations to facilitate rural women's access to information, services and means of communication, and to promote the development of village-based knowledge centres;

Unpaid care work and access to services

(l) To reduce the burden of women's unpaid care work by providing improved infrastructure, labour-saving technologies and care services for children, the elderly and the vulnerable in rural areas;

(m) To put in place adequate methodologies and data collection systems for analysing the unpaid business/farming work and the unpaid care work of rural women, and for addressing their impact;

(n) To promote rural women's and girls' access to maternal health services, and to education and training, including through establishing mandatory school programmes, local facilities, scholarships and mentorship programmes, as well as early child development programmes and child-care facilities;

Sustainable development

(o) To invest in rural women engaged in promoting sustainable agriculture and biodiversity, and in community-based renewable energy technologies in rural and remote areas;

(p) To integrate the perspectives of rural women into the preparations for, outcomes of and follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in order to accelerate progress on gender equality and women's empowerment in rural areas.

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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern, and further actions and initiatives

Empowerment of rural women: the role of gender-responsive governance and institutions

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report examines the contributions of gender-responsive governance and institutions to rural women's empowerment. The report concludes with recommendations for consideration by the Commission on the Status of Women.

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I. Introduction

1. At its fifty-sixth session, the Commission on the Status of Women will consider as its priority theme "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges". The present report examines the extent to which gender-responsive governance and institutions respond to women's capacities and needs in rural areas and promote their empowerment. The economic empowerment of rural women is addressed in a separate report of the Secretary-General on the priority theme (E/CN.6/2012/3). Both reports are to serve as inputs for the Commission's consideration of the priority theme and should be read together (see also document E/CN.6/2012/10).

2. This report, which responds to Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/9, incorporates an analysis of contributions by Member States[1] and draws on information and data from United Nations entities[2] and other sources, as indicated. It concludes with recommendations for future action for the consideration of the Commission.

II. Governance and institutional structures

3. Rural women's and men's lives and the roles they play are multidimensional and dynamic, and are impacted by policies, institutions and rules as well as the gender relations institutionalized in households, communities and society at large. The extent to which women and men have access to institutions, and the extent to which these institutions serve rural populations can determine whether women's livelihoods are sustainable and improve their well-being. Formal institutions include ministries, parliament and local councils. The empowerment of rural women is affected by policies made and services delivered by a number of line ministries, including the ministries of agricultural and rural development, infrastructure, public utilities, energy, finance, education and health. Farmers' organizations, cooperatives and women's organizations, as well as community-based institutions such as water-use groups and self-help groups, cater to rural women. However, women are underrepresented in many of these organizations as members and in key decision-making roles, and their priorities and needs are often inadequately addressed.

4. Gender-responsive governance structures are essential to ensuring that rural women's agency and rights are central to all stages of policymaking, including design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. While there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach, development initiatives in recent years have emphasized the importance of strengthening accountability and transparency of gender-responsive governance.

[1] Contributions were received from the Governments of Cameroon, Colombia, Denmark, Djibouti, Estonia, Fiji, Finland, Germany, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Mauritius, New Zealand, Serbia, South Africa, the Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, the Syrian Arab Republic, Timor-Leste and Ukraine.

[2] The following United Nations entities provided inputs: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC); Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA); Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD); International Labour Office (ILO); United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women); and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

5. For the purpose of this report, three groups of actors have been identified in the context of gender-responsive governance structures:[3] the government, service providers and citizens. Within the government, politicians and policymakers are the main agents involved in the policymaking process. Service providers include both the management within public institutions that are mandated to implement policies and oversee service delivery (such as ministries) and the service delivery personnel. While many services are still being delivered by the public sector, the private sector and non-governmental organizations have increasingly assumed the role of service providers in recent decades. Citizens are both the beneficiaries of the services delivered and the constituency holding policymakers and politicians accountable.

6. Interactions among these actors underline the three major governance processes: policymaking, public administration and service delivery. During the policymaking process, legal and policy frameworks are developed, with citizens exerting their influence, usually through civil society organizations. Legal and policy frameworks are implemented by the relevant public administration which should be inclusive and responsive to citizens. In the service delivery process, the actual services are delivered by frontline service personnel from the public sector, private providers or the non-governmental organizations. Finally, based on the services received or on needs identified owing to lack of service provisions, citizens and civil society can exercise their rights to hold the government and providers accountable.[4]

7. Clearly, the relationships established among actors are not gender-neutral. Women are frequently disadvantaged and marginalized in their participation and contributions to these three processes owing to prevailing gender stereotypes.[5] Major entry points for fostering gender-responsive governance encompass women's participation in politics and policymaking, including in the design and delivery of public services, women's leadership in civil society organizations, gender-responsive policy design and implementation, and women's influence over service providers through exertion of client power and choice.[6]

8. It is important to bear in mind that this governance model is embedded within a larger global context. Governments, at all levels, are held accountable for the international and regional normative and policy frameworks to which they have committed. Key global legal and policy frameworks on rural women's rights include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women[7] and the Beijing Platform for Action (1995).[8]

[3] World Bank, *World Development Report 2004: Making Services Work for Poor People* (Washington, D.C., 2003).

[4] Ibid., United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), *Who Answers to Women? Gender and Accountability: Progress of the World's Women 2008/2009* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.08.III.E.1).

[5] Leah Horowitz, "Getting good government for women: a literature review", Agriculture and Rural Development Discussion Paper, No. 43 (Washington, D.C., 2009).

[6] *Who Answers to Women? Gender and Accountability*.

[7] United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1249, No. 20378.

[8] *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.

III. The role of national and local governments

9. Gender-responsive policymaking addresses the challenges faced by women in rural areas, including unequal access to key productive assets and services such as land and financial services, as well as the lack of recognition of their diverse roles in agriculture and off-farm activities (see also E/CN.6/2012/3). It is equally important to review, amend or abolish existing laws and regulations that discriminate against women. Failure to do so runs the risk of further creating and reinforcing gender biases and patterns of exclusion.

National government

10. To ensure gender-responsive policy processes, Member States have taken various approaches, including the gender mainstreaming strategy, use of gender-specific provisions in legal and policy instruments, and special measures and programmes targeting rural women. These efforts have put different levels of emphasis on addressing the needs of rural women, with some specifically targeting rural women and others merely including rural women as one of several beneficiary categories.

11. Many countries reported efforts to mainstream a gender perspective into national policies that could impact rural women. For example, New Zealand takes a whole-of-government approach to gender mainstreaming for all national policies including rural development and agricultural policies.

12. Some Member States use legal frameworks for gender equality to regulate all policymaking activities undertaken by public authorities. Denmark's Gender Equality Act of 2000 obliges public authorities to take equality into account in all public planning and activities. The preparation and implementation of the Rural Development Programme for Mainland Finland 2007-2013 are regulated by the gender-equality requirements contained in the Act on Equality between Women and Men. In Estonia, the Ministry of Agriculture is required to develop and implement rural and agricultural policies in compliance with the generally applicable legal framework of gender equality when developing eligibility criteria for programmes and resource allocation.

13. In many countries, gender mainstreaming efforts are led by national machineries for gender equality. In Timor-Leste, the participation of the Office of the Secretary of State for the Promotion of Equality in working groups is aimed at mainstreaming a gender perspective into the National Priority on Rural Development of 2009 and 2011, and the National Priority on Food Security of 2010. Since 2010, the Office has conducted gender analyses of key ministries' annual action plans and budgets and has provided comments to the office of the Prime Minister before the plans are sent to the Ministry of Finance and Parliament for approval. In Mauritius, the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare has set up a National Committee on Gender Mainstreaming to ensure that gender issues are mainstreamed in all policies and programmes of line ministries including the Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security.

14. Countries have also developed provisions targeting rural women in various policy instruments including agricultural and rural development policies, national development strategies, national action plans on gender equality, and sectoral gender policies. For example, the Rural Area Programme for Sweden 2007-2013 requires

that the promotion of gender equality must be reflected in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all rural and regional development programmes. In Italy, the National Strategic Plan for Rural Development includes an instrument aimed at providing women farm managers with the opportunity to carry out joint business activities across various farm sectors such as production, processing and marketing. In Japan, the Third Basic Plan for Gender Equality (2010) includes the promotion of gender equality in agricultural, forestry and fisheries communities among its priorities. Colombia adopted a specific law (No. 731/2002) on the improvement of the status of rural women in the country.

15. Many countries reported special programmes and projects targeting rural women. For example, the Ministry of the Empowerment of Women and Family of Cameroon provided funds to poor women through the Ministry's Centres for the Empowerment of Women. Some countries (Denmark, Fiji and Mauritius) established facilities, such as women's centres and market booths in rural areas, for business support and entrepreneurial development. Others (Fiji, Italy, Japan, Kenya and Timor-Leste) continue to provide rural women with various opportunities for training and participation in workshops whose goal is to enhance women's skills, including through training in entrepreneurial and business skills, leadership skills, and technical and agricultural skills. United Nations entities including UNDP and UNESCO have also assisted in the provision of training activities to rural women.

16. Some national policies do not contain special provisions or measures targeted at rural women; instead, they are included as beneficiaries within other groups. For example, Fiji's Road Map for Democracy and Sustainable Socio-Economic Development 2009-2014 and the Women's Plan of Action for 2010-2019 lay out a broad range of strategies and actions designed to empower all women, including rural women. The Strategy Paper for Growth and Employment is Cameroon's tool for implementing the national vision for development for 2010-2020. It provides guidance on promoting equality between women and men in seven sectors, including infrastructure, the rural sector, industries and services.

17. While it is essential that legal and policy frameworks respond to women's needs, it is equally important to ensure that the process of implementation of these policies leads to concrete changes in women's lives. Although many countries have national gender policies that guide the implementation of the gender-equality agenda, there remains the challenge of aligning sectoral policies and budgeting processes with gender policies. However, little information is available on concrete implementation and outcomes.

18. Rural women, including indigenous women, remain underrepresented in national parliaments and within public administration owing to lack of education; insufficient leadership skills; the traditional exclusion of women from decision-making forums; and structural disadvantages and inequities, stemming, inter alia, from class, caste and ethnic differences. In addition, women may be constrained by restricted mobility, inability to attend meetings held at inconvenient times or locations, lack of transport, security concerns, and childcare and other caregiving responsibilities.[9]

[9] Catherine Hill, "Enabling rural women's economic empowerment: institutions, opportunities and participation" (EGM/RW/2011/BP.1), background paper prepared for the Expert Group Meeting on Enabling Rural Women's Economic Empowerment: Institutions, Opportunities and Participation, Accra, 20-23 September 2011.

19. A number of measures can be taken to strengthen women's participation in policymaking processes, in both elected and appointed positions. Quotas and other temporary special measures have played an important role in increasing both the number of women in political life and their contributions thereto. Quotas can be implemented through constitutions and laws and are also applied by political parties on a voluntary basis. In the public sector, quota provisions vary in the legislative and executive branch. The Constitution of Kenya requires at least one third of positions on policymaking committees to be reserved for both women and men. The preparation of Finland's Rural Development Programme required official working bodies to have a minimum of 40 per cent of both women and men.

Local government and decentralization

20. By virtue of their closer relationship with people, local governments play a key role in promoting greater equality and building inclusive societies. It is increasingly expected that local governments will provide people, especially the most marginalized groups, with the opportunity to participate more actively in public life, and they thus hold out the promise that policies and service provision can be made more responsive to the needs of rural women and men.[10] However, local governments cannot be assumed to be inherently more effective, or interested, in advancing gender equality, as male-dominated norms and values prevail also at local levels.[11]

21. In recent decades, decentralization reforms have been promoted as a means of deepening democracy and improving development through the transfer of functions, resources, and varying degrees of political and fiscal autonomy to local governments and other subnational entities.[12] Decentralization is inherently a political process that shifts power and authority and is thus likely to face resistance from national-level agencies when fiscal and human resources are transferred to local governments. When decentralization of political power is not accompanied by necessary devolution of fiscal and administrative resources to local governments, it creates the "unfunded mandates" problem, where local governments are left vulnerable in the face of multiplying responsibilities and diminishing resources.[13] In other cases, decentralization is often accompanied by cutbacks in central government allocations to local authorities. As local governments must recover their own costs, they often do so through service fees and user charges, which can be potentially redistributive and have a negative impact on poor people including women.[14]

[10] World Bank, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and International Fund for Agricultural Development, *Gender in Agriculture Sourcebook* (Washington, D.C., 2008); Prabha Khosla and Bernhard Barth, *Gender in Local Government: A Sourcebook for Trainers* (Nairobi, United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), 2008).

[11] Khosla and Barth, *Gender in Local Government*.

[12] Outcome document of the Conference on Decentralization, Local Power and Women's Rights, organized by the International Development Research Centre (Canada) and other partners, Mexico City, 18-21 November 2008.

[13] *Gender in Agriculture Sourcebook*.

[14] Jo Beall, "Decentralization, women's rights and development" (London, London School of Economics and Political Science, Development Studies Institute, 21 March 2007).

22. To make decentralization a truly empowering process for women, measures need to be taken to integrate a gender perspective into all local policies, planning and budgeting processes, as well as into the political and administrative functions of local governments. For example, in Serbia, the draft strategy for the improved economic status of rural women in the autonomous province of Vojvodina 2012 is being developed by the Provincial Secretariat for Labour, Employment and Gender Equality with assistance from the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). The process includes mapping and adapting existing programmes for the economic empowerment of rural women.

23. It is equally important to strengthen the technical and administrative capacity of local authorities to empower rural women. Local governments need administrative and organizational competence and human and financial resources to fulfil the diverse expectations of women and men with respect to local services including security, access to justice, public services, political participation and economic well-being. Local councillors and officials need to develop gender expertise and capacity, especially in key local administration units such as planning, budgeting and service delivery. There need to be established meaningful consultation mechanisms for gathering information from women in a wide range of situations at the community level on their gender-specific needs and interests.[15] For example, since the commencement of Ghana's decentralization process in the early 1990s, efforts have been made to enhance local governments' attention to women's priorities in development processes, including through the establishment of gender focal points within local governments.[16]

24. The level of women's participation as elected officials in local government remains low owing to historical and institutional barriers, women's lack of access to informal networks, and cultural norms and prejudices directed against women. However, without strong participation of women at the local level, the gains made at the national level cannot be sustained in the long run.[17] A number of countries use quota systems at the local level to strengthen women's participation. Serbia's Law on Local Elections requires that at least 30 per cent of candidates in local self-administration elections belong to the underrepresented gender. In India, a 30 per cent quota has been established at the panchayat level. South Africa established a quota system for women's participation in rural traditional leadership ranks. Timor-Leste introduced a quota at the village level in 2010, requiring that two out of five village council members be women.

Mechanisms and tools

25. Effective use of gender-responsive mechanisms and tools can help ensure the integration of a gender perspective throughout the policy process. In Finland, for example, separate gender analyses were conducted, in the preparation of the Rural Development Programme, to assess the capacities and needs of rural women and

[15] Helen O'Connell, "Preserve status quo or promote gender equality?", "Capacity.ORG", No. 40 (August 2010). Available from http://capacity.org/capacity/export/sites/capacity/documents/journal-pdfs/CAP1001_40_ENG_LR.pdf.

[16] Esther Ofei-Aboagye, "Promoting gender sensitivity in local governance in Ghana", *Development in Practice*, vol. 14, No. 6 (November 2004).

[17] Beall, "Decentralization, women's rights and development".

men in order to formulate gender-responsive strategies and measures. Timor-Leste introduced a number of measures in line ministries, including gender assessments, to increase gender awareness and reflect the needs and priorities of rural women in the sectors of agriculture and fisheries, health, education, and vocational training and employment.

26. Gender-responsive budgeting, which can be an important tool for the agricultural sector, is a process that encompasses conducting gender analysis of budgets, identifying gender-equality gaps in policies and budgets, and monitoring and evaluating the financial resources allocated for the implementation of government commitments on gender equality. The emphasis on monitoring and accountability fosters an enabling environment for ensuring adequate resource allocation for the achievement of gender-equality goals, including provision of services in rural areas.[18]

27. In 2009, the Gender Centres in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the support of UN-Women, conducted a gender analysis of the agriculture sector with the goal of integrating gender-responsive budgeting into agriculture and rural development strategies. The findings and recommendations of the gender analysis were utilized in the work of the Gender-Responsive Budgeting Working Group for the period of 2010-2013. The gender-responsive budgeting action plan for 2011 requires the Ministry of Agriculture in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina to conduct gender analysis in the context of the Law on Agriculture and the medium-term development strategy and its implementation plan.

28. Capacity development within Governments remains a widely used strategy for promoting rural women's empowerment. To strengthen the capacity of line ministries in promoting gender equality, a number of countries such as Japan, Kenya, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic have put in place gender officers and/or gender units within line ministries. In the Sudan, the Gender Mainstreaming in Agriculture Development Unit within the Ministry of Agriculture is responsible for supporting and promoting economic development opportunities for rural women. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the Directorate for the Development of Rural Women is in charge of implementing the strategy for rural development of the Ministry of Agriculture, with the goal of involving rural women in policy implementation and follow-up of programmes.

29. Member States and United Nations entities have also made efforts to develop capacity within the context of gender-equality issues through training and workshops. Training opportunities can target women and men in their role as elected officials, civil servants and service providers. For example, the Gender Equality Office of Serbia organizes training sessions for civil servants on basic gender issues and gender-responsive budgeting. The UNESCO project on "training needs of women in the panchayat villages" in India aims at providing locally elected female representatives with information on their rights. In Tajikistan, UNFPA works to build capacities on gender-equality issues for actors including civil servants, service delivery personnel, legal service providers, policymakers and religious leaders.

[18] *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development 2009: Women's Control over Economic Resources and Access to Financial Resources, including Microfinance* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.09.IV.7).

30. Networks of government institutions and other stakeholders can also contribute to the formulation of relevant strategies and programmes for rural women. In this regard, the National Observatory for Female Enterprise and Labour in Agriculture of Italy consists of representatives from a range of ministries, professional agricultural organizations, regions and autonomous provinces, and research and statistical offices. In Liberia, the National Gender Forum brings together gender focal points of all line ministries to enhance their capacity in gender mainstreaming and analysis.[19]

31. Accountability as a core element of good governance, entails monitoring of performance in policymaking, implementation and service delivery, and imposition of corrective action or remedies in case of performance failure, as well as assessment of the adequacy of government performance. In the context of a gender-responsive accountability system, the decisions of public authorities need to be assessed against the needs and interests of women and men equally. For instance, gender-equality performance reviews have been integrated into a number of institutional innovations, such as participatory municipal budgeting in several Latin American countries and citizen participation in the Federal Electoral Institute of Mexico.[20]

32. Developing an enabling policy environment and effective gender-responsive policies requires developing and strengthening knowledge and skills among different stakeholders, including civil servants and service providers, so as to ensure the generation, analysis and use of the comparable gender-sensitive indicators and sex-, age- and rural/urban disaggregated data needed to inform policy development, as well as monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation.

33. Fiji undertakes a periodic national survey on rural women's participation in agriculture. The Fourth National Agriculture Census, which is the most recent, collected and analysed sex-disaggregated data in rural areas. In 2009, Timor-Leste established an Inter-Ministerial Commission for Rural Development to monitor the gender-responsive implementation of the Strategic Framework for Rural Development 2010-2020. In Kenya, line ministries collaborate with the national machinery for gender equality on the collection of sex-disaggregated data.

34. United Nations entities such as FAO, ECLAC and ESCWA have also taken measures to advance the collection of comparable sex-disaggregated data and gender indicators. For example, FAO has worked for a number of years on developing the institutional capacity of central statistics offices in several countries to improve the design and collection of sex-disaggregated agricultural and rural employment data. It has also developed the Agri-Gender Statistics Toolkit for the production of sex-disaggregated agricultural data. The FAO Gender and Land Rights Database collects country-level information on gender inequalities embedded in issues related to land rights. ECLAC has collected data on women in non-remunerated activities, disaggregated by rural and urban areas, in 17 countries. It also collects sex-disaggregated data, including economic participation, employment and poverty indicators, in order to monitor the situation of women in rural areas.

[19] Contribution of UN-Women.

[20] *Who Answers to Women? Gender and Accountability.*

IV. Service delivery

35. The delivery of better services to women is key for the achievement of economic and social development, in particular of the Millennium Development Goals. Accessible quality services that address women's needs and priorities are necessary in order for women to be able to enjoy their rights including the right to health, to education and to decent work. Services, including transportation, water, sanitation and energy, that are well-designed can address the challenges that rural women face and reduce and ease the unpaid care work (see also document E/CN.6/2012/3) that rural women typically perform.[21] Evidence shows that the improvement of service design and delivery processes to increase transparency, participation and accountability benefits not only women but a range of other users.[22]

36. Rural women continue to face challenges in accessing public services, including structural failures in service provision, Governments' bias towards urban areas, and lack of access to registration and formal identification. In addition, rural women tend not to engage with service delivery mechanisms in a decision-making capacity owing to a lack of information and agency. They have fewer opportunities for informing service providers of their needs and for organizing themselves in order to demand better services and social accountability.[23]

37. Owing to the triple challenges of structural failures, by State, market and community, services are often not provided to the extent needed in rural areas, thereby jeopardizing the livelihoods of the rural poor, including women.[24] The State often fails to ensure adequate provision of public services to rural citizens owing to limited budgeting powers of local governments in rural areas, as well as to the higher costs associated with extending services to isolated or remote areas. Service delivery through alternative providers, including the private sector, public-private partnerships and civil society organizations, has faced similar difficulties in terms of balancing concerns of funding, quality standards and reach. Moreover, national policies governing service delivery tend to be designed in line with the priorities and needs of urban rather than rural areas. The difficulties associated with basic service delivery in developing countries are further exacerbated by limited financial resources, poor maintenance of the service infrastructure, and lack of clarity in respect of the separation of functions across governments at different levels as a result of decentralization reform.[25]

38. In most countries, a prerequisite for accessing basic services is securing a formal identification card through civil registration. However, such a process can be a very difficult one for marginalized populations, especially women in rural and remote areas. In this regard, research of UN-Women shows that the proportion of

[21] *Who Answers to Women? Gender and Accountability*; Annika Allman and others, "Making public services work for women: lessons from UN Public Service Award nominees" (June 2011).

[22] Allman and others, "Making public services for women".

[23] UN-Women, "Gender and democratic governance programme document: delivering basic services to women in fragile contexts" (New York, 2010).

[24] World Bank and International Food Policy Research Institute, *Gender and Governance in Rural Services: Insights from India, Ghana and Ethiopia* (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2010).

[25] Harold Lockwood and Stef Smits, *Supporting Rural Water Supply: Moving Towards A Service Delivery Approach* (Rugby, Warwickshire, United Kingdom, Practical Action Publishing for IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre and Aguaconsult, 2011).

women without identification cards can be as high as 80 per cent in some villages in rural Egypt, which hampers their access to health, education, pensions, applications for property titles or deeds, and other social services, in addition to their ability to vote.[26]

39. Public services often fail to respond to the needs and challenges of rural women. In many parts of the world, women are constrained by physical distances, poor transport infrastructure, concerns for physical safety, and cultural norms that limit women's mobility or discourage women from entering the public sphere.[27] In situations of domestic violence, for example, a lack of available childcare or employment opportunities can exacerbate women's lack of access to basic support services (police protection, safe accommodation, health care and legal assistance), which further compounds their psychosocial isolation. Services that do not take these gender-specific factors into account often fail to reach women recipients. Moreover, biases in public spending towards men's priorities and needs further exacerbate the situation. Despite the important roles that women play in agriculture, the perception bias that "women are not farmers" persists, which makes it even more challenging to provide much-needed services to rural women.[28]

40. Member States and United Nations entities have taken measures to improve service delivery to rural women, with some focusing on the improvement of infrastructure and basic services. For example, Kenya reported to have improved distribution of piped water and enhanced rural electrification. In Djibouti, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, with the support of the Arab League, initiated a number of projects to reduce women's vulnerability due to limited water supply. To enhance women's access to services, UN-Women supported the Government of Moldova in establishing joint information and services bureaux, which bring key public, private and civil society organizations' service providers to one physical location on a regular basis. They also undertake joint mobile visits to remote villages.

41. Improving service delivery can also be achieved through strengthening the accountability of governance. In the governance process, service recipients can hold delivery personnel accountable both through the short route of exercising client power and choice of service providers and through the longer route of influencing the policymaking process on service provision. However, the choice of service providers is sometimes not an option for rural women, especially when their purchasing power is limited.[29] To ensure gender-responsive service delivery, women's participation and voice should be taken into account in the design delivery, and accountability processes of public services. Women should be engaged proactively during the process through consultations and dialogues with women's groups, increased women's presence among frontline service delivery personnel,

[26] UN-Women, "Strengthening women's voices for gender-responsive services in fragile contexts" (New York, 2011); data provided by the Ministry of the Interior of Egypt in October 2011.

[27] *Who Answers to Women? Gender and Accountability*; UN-Women, "United Nations Public Service Award Forum Workshop: Leading Innovations in Gender-responsive Service Delivery, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 21-22 June, 2011" (New York, 2011); Allman and others, "Making public services work for women".

[28] *Gender and Governance in Rural Services*; "United Nations Public Service Award Forum Workshop: Leading innovations in gender-responsive service delivery"; *Gender in Agriculture Sourcebook*.

[29] Horowitz, "Getting good government for women".

and facilitation of rural women's ability to organize themselves and to hold service providers accountable. Additional measures could include providing incentives to reward gender-responsive performance and imposing sanctions for neglect of women's needs,[30] building capacity of frontline service delivery personnel on gender-equality issues, raising awareness among rural populations on women's rights and entitlements, and developing gender-sensitive indicators for monitoring gender-responsive service delivery.[31]

42. Governments should play a central role in providing essential services, either directly or in partnerships with the private sector and non-governmental organizations. Thus, adequate public spending is essential to the quality delivery of these services. However, financing for rural services faces multiple challenges. Costs of these services are typically raised through taxes, user fees and intergovernmental transfers. Although user fees for accessing services are levied in many parts of the world, such fees can limit the access of the poor and lead to lower levels of usage by vulnerable and marginalized populations. Consequently, public services that are essential to rural development and people's livelihoods should be funded through higher levels of government, including provincial and central governments.[32]

43. Establishing well-functioning social protection schemes that are sustainable in the long run serves as a good case in point in this regard. Social protection provides cushions to the vulnerable population and enables people to better overcome poverty and social exclusion in times of financial turmoil and difficulty. However, social protection in most developing countries has been largely confined to those employed in the formal sector.[33] As many rural women work as temporary, family, casual or seasonal workers, extension of public social protection schemes to the workers in the informal sector can bridge some of the gender gaps in rural areas.[34]

44. Recent years have witnessed a growing recognition that the design of social protection should be gender-responsive and that social protection should be extended to all in a coherent and coordinated manner. A minimum social protection floor comprises a basic set of social rights, services and facilities that every person should be able to enjoy, including universal access to essential health care and minimum income security.[35] National Governments should play a leading role in the development of relevant institutions, such as social protection sector coordinating agencies. Policies and legislation need to be developed to ensure accountability, especially regarding the rights and entitlements of people as well as responsibilities and eligibility criteria for accessing guaranteed benefits. Moreover, several studies have attested to the affordability of a minimum social protection floor and have discussed potential avenues for financing such as expenditure reallocation and tax reform and utilization of international development resources.[36]

[30] *Who Answers to Women? Gender and Accountability*.

[31] Ibid.

[32] OECD, *OECD Rural Policy Reviews: Strategies to Improve Rural Service Delivery* (Paris, 2010).

[33] *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development*.

[34] *Gender in Agriculture Sourcebook*.

[35] See www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/spfag/index.htm.

[36] International Labour Organization, *Social Protection Floor for a Fair and Exclusive Globalization* (Geneva, International Labour Office, 2011).

45. Significant progress has been made towards the implementation of social protection floor in many developing countries. This process has moved faster in middle-income countries, benefiting millions of people including rural women. For example, there is the India Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 (NREGA), providing for a programme that guarantees 100 days of work to rural households that want to undertake unskilled manual work, with 33 per cent of all workdays reserved for women workers.[37] Incorporated into the Constitution in 2005,[38] the programme is financed by central and provincial governments and implemented by the Ministry of Rural Development together with actors at State and local levels.[39]

46. Better access to information and technologies is also important for the empowerment of rural women and can be achieved through engaging women farmers in research, development and extension work. To be truly gender-responsive, scientific institutions and researchers must work closely with the target user population for the development and deployment of technology. Agricultural research and extension institutions also need to involve women proactively, for example, by increasing the number of women agricultural extension agents and gender-sensitive male agricultural extension agents. Current data show that only 5 per cent of agricultural extension services are addressed to rural women and that less than 15 per cent of the world's extension agents are women.[40] UNDP has worked in Togo to enhance women's representation among extension officers. UN-Women is supporting the Ministry of Agriculture of Rwanda in transforming its provision of agricultural extension services.

V. The role of rural institutions

47. Rural institutions that represent farmers and entrepreneurs in rural areas include a wide range of farmers' and producers' organizations, cooperatives, women's groups and other membership-based organizations, as well as public, private and mixed service providers such as extension services, trade associations and microfinance organizations.

Farmers' and producers' organizations

48. Farmers' and rural producers' organizations are independent non-governmental membership-based rural organizations of self-employed smallholders and family farmers, pastoralists, artisanal fishers, landless people, small entrepreneurs and indigenous peoples. They have mixed memberships of women and men, but there are also women-only organizations. They range from formal groups covered by

[37] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, International Fund for Agricultural Development and International Labour Office, *Gender Dimensions of Agricultural and Rural Employment: Differentiated Pathways Out of Poverty — Status, Trends and Gaps* (Rome, 2010).

[38] United Nations Development Programme, "Employment guarantee policies; Policy brief: gender equality and poverty reduction", No. 2 (April 2010).

[39] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *The State of Food and Agriculture: Women in Agriculture — Closing the Gender Gap for Development* (Rome, 2011); *Social Protection Floor for a Fair Globalization*. See also NREGA website (http://nrega.nic.in/).

[40] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, "FAO Gender and Development Plan of Action (2002-2007)" (Rome, 2003).

national legislation, such as cooperatives and national farmers unions, to self-help groups and associations.[41] By organizing, farmers can strengthen their political voice through advocacy, achieve economies of scale, and gain access to more market opportunities through increased bargaining power.

49. While women may make up 30-50 per cent of the membership of farmers' organizations, they are generally underrepresented in leadership positions, with underrepresentation increasing as one moves from the local to the provincial, national and international levels. For example, in the Asian Farmers' Association, 9 out of 10 national member organizations have mixed membership, but none of them are led by a woman.[42] Some mixed organizations have a dedicated women's branch which can serve as a platform for negotiation by women within the organization as well as with external partners.

50. The organizational culture and rules of procedure within formal organizations can contribute to the marginalization of women. Making institutions gender-sensitive, through improving working methods and institutional cultures and tackling gender stereotypes, can increase their ability to address gender-equality issues in legislative and policy development.

51. A number of good practices exist to strengthen the role and voice of women in farmers' organizations. Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management (WOCAN), in cooperation with IFAD, has piloted the Rural Women's Leadership Program in the Philippines and Nepal to provide support to women leaders and increase the responsiveness of national policies, programmes and institutions to the needs of rural women producers and workers. PAKISAMA, a national confederation of 28 mixed farmers' organizations in the Philippines, launched a series of gender-sensitivity seminars among women and men leaders at the local, regional and national levels. The combined strategy of awareness-raising and leadership training contributed to the formation and strengthening of the women committees within member organizations. Gender and anti-sexual harassment policies and guidelines were adopted with a view to mainstreaming a gender perspective in the work of farmers' organizations. An affirmative action policy stipulates that women should have a representation of at least 30 per cent in all project activities.

52. In the context of the biennial Farmers' Forum in 2010, IFAD sponsored a special session on promoting women's leadership in farmers' and rural producers' organizations. The participants agreed on a number of strategies for strengthening women leaders' participation in national and global policy processes and in consultations with donors and other aid organizations, including a minimum quota of 30 per cent (to reach 50 per cent over time) in all projects and programmes that work with farmers' organizations, and the provision of financial resources to increase the capacity of farmers' organizations to address gender issues.

[41] "SARD and farmers' organizations", Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (SARD) Policy Brief, No. 12 (2007).

[42] Esther Penunia, "The role of farmers' organizations in empowering and promoting the leadership of rural women" (EGM/RW/2011/EP.12), expert paper prepared for the Expert Group Meeting on Enabling Rural Women's Economic Empowerment: Institutions, Opportunities and Participation, Accra, 20-23 September 2011.

Cooperatives

53. Cooperatives are membership-based organizations and enterprises in which individuals pool resources in order to meet economic, social and environmental goals such as poverty reduction, productive employment and the empowerment of women. The membership feature of cooperatives has the potential to empower the poor through community self-reliance, collaboration and cohesion. Cooperatives are estimated to have 1 billion individual members worldwide,[43] account for more than 100 million jobs (according to 2009 statistics) and market 50 per cent of global agricultural output.[44]

54. They play a key role in supporting agriculture and rural development by marketing agricultural products and improving farmers' access to markets in areas where the private sector is weak or unable to meet the needs of farmers for credit or inputs.[45] Some agricultural cooperatives are using the fair trade approach as a tool for widening markets and ensuring farmers' incomes in view of growing global competition and volatility in food prices.[46] More recently, agricultural cooperatives have become more involved in agricultural financing. In some countries, such as Ghana, Egypt and Kenya, agricultural cooperatives are diversifying their activities by moving into the areas of savings and credit provision. Some financial cooperatives, such as Sistema de Crédito Cooperativo (Sicredi) in Brazil, also offer health insurance products, thereby reducing members' vulnerability to the increase in health costs and economic shocks.[47]

55. Agricultural cooperatives have the potential to promote rural women's economic empowerment, including through their uniting to overcome restrictions in pursuing commercial or economic activities. They benefit substantially from pooling resources and sharing information and knowledge. Women-only cooperatives in South Asia, for example, facilitate economic independence and improve the social standing of women through their active participation in businesses and exposure to management experience and other training. In Djibouti, there has been an increasing organization of women farmers into cooperatives in recent years. The Ministry of Agriculture has provided support to agro-farming cooperatives (there are about 25 cooperatives, involving nearly 5,000 women). Participation in management committees allows them to gradually participate in the process of decision-making in their region. The Timor-Leste Ministry of Economy and Development, with the support of ILO and IrishAid, provided technical and financial support to women cooperatives in a range of activities including handicrafts, horticulture and coffee production.

56. Nonetheless, the overall level of participation of women in agricultural cooperatives remains low owing to a lack of resources and information as well as cultural constraints. In agricultural cooperatives in many Asian countries, women account for only 2-10.5 per cent of total membership.[48] In an effort to enhance

[43] See www.ica.coop.

[44] "Cooperatives and rural employment", ILO COOP Fact sheet, No. 1 (2007).

[45] See documents A/64/132 and Corr.1; and A/66/136.

[46] See United Nations, "The cooperative advantage", "DESA News", vol. 11, No. 11 (November 2007).

[47] A/64/132.

[48] Ibid.

women's leadership in rural cooperatives, Japan adjusted the criteria for the appointment of female board members.

Women's organizations

57. In many countries, rural women's organizations play an important role in advocating for rural women's interests and participation in the development of rural policies and programmes. Finland's Rural Women's Advisory Organization represents rural women's interests in the Rural Policy Committee, the network of rural development actors, and participates in the Monitoring Committee of the Rural Development Programme. ETNA Estonia, an association of entrepreneurial rural women, represents rural women in the preparation and monitoring of Estonia's Rural Development Plan and provides support to capacity-building of entrepreneurial and employment skills. Germany's Association of Rural Women cooperates with the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth on various projects designed to enhance the working conditions of women and establish networks among women in rural areas. The Union of Swiss Women Farmers promotes awareness-raising on political issues and the Union of Rural Women of Ukraine is focused, inter alia, on securing access to justice.

58. In Kenya, rural women have organized watchdog groups[49] to address issues related to property and land rights such as lack of assistance by local officials and contradictory legal regimes. They identified key constraints women face within their communities; identified key stakeholders such as local administrations, the judiciary, the police and land dispute tribunals; documented violations of women's right to land; and engaged in dialogue with stakeholders which led to their participation in decision-making processes.

Financial institutions

59. Women's access to all financial services, including savings, insurance, remittance transfers and credit, is essential to their economic empowerment and livelihood. Rural financial services are provided by a range of institutions including commercial and State-owned banks, membership-based financial organizations (such as rural financial cooperatives and credit unions), microfinance institutions and integrated rural development programmes and multisector organizations.[50]

60. The variety of rural financial service providers discussed above exhibit vastly different levels of achievement with regard to women's empowerment. Some service providers mainly or exclusively target women, while others, especially the formal finance providers, demonstrate an insufficient involvement in provision of resources to women. In fact, women as an underserved group of financial service users constitute an underdeveloped and potentially profitable market to the financial sector. In order for rural finance providers to ensure that their systems fully meet the needs of women, it is imperative that a gender-responsive institutional culture be

[49] Grools Kenya, "Taking actions: grassroots women leading to curb asset stripping, property and land disinheritance" (1 July 2008).

[50] *Gender in Agriculture Sourcebook*.

developed, that incorporation of gender-responsiveness in all interactions with clients be ensured and that gender-sensitivity training to staff be provided.[51]

61. In recent years, efforts have been stepped up to address the failure of the formal financial system in serving the poor and disadvantaged, including women. One key response to the failure of the formal financial system has been the growth of microfinance services, which aim to provide financial services on a scale large enough to reduce poverty on a financially sustainable and even profitable basis. Those services encompass the continuum from "poverty lending", that is, donor-subsidized lending to the poor, to a "financial systems" approach which stresses financial sustainability.[52]

62. Microfinance, through a successful targeting of women, individually and in groups, has strengthened their livelihoods, helped develop entrepreneurial skills and enhanced their involvement in community governance. However, there is a growing recognition that microfinance is not the solution to all of the challenges faced by women. While considerable evidence indicates a positive impact on reducing income fluctuations, the growing pursuit of financial sustainability goals has led to the neglect of the extremely poor by a large proportion of microfinance organizations, which could disproportionately affect rural women.[53] In addition, over time many microfinance institutions have been transformed into commercial and regulated entities; and as a result, the proportion of women clients has declined and group-based lending has shifted to individual lending.[54]

Other community-based organizations

63. Self-help groups are voluntary associations that aim to solve common problems, such as those involving access to savings and lending. Group membership helps build solidarity and self-esteem and has the potential to empower women in their demands for economic and productive resources. It can also increase their experience in respect of issues involving decision-making and leadership. The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), a registered trade union of 800,000 women in India, aims to improve women's income and food security through full employment and to strengthen women's capacity to participate in policymaking bodies.

64. Water usage associations have been established in many countries in response to an increasing demand for water. The involvement of water users in the management and operation of irrigation schemes is critical to a more efficient performance of irrigation schemes and enhanced water governance. However, in many countries, women's participation in water associations is much lower than that of men owing to assumptions about women's role in irrigation, restrictions in membership to landowners and women's hesitation to participate in men-dominated organizations. Greater participation of women has been achieved in countries and areas where there has been greater recognition among the members of the population of women's roles, equal allocation of land or allowance for other forms

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid.

[53] *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development*.

[54] Women's World Banking, "Stemming the tide of mission drift: microfinance transformations and the double bottom line", WWB focus note (New York, 2008).

of tenure besides ownership, institution of a quota for women's membership in water associations, and provision of training for women on income-generation activities.[55]

VI. Conclusion and recommendations

65. **In the context of the recent global crises, the role of agriculture and rural development has awakened renewed interest. The outcome document of the 2010 High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals[56] and the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011-2020[57] committed to promoting the empowerment and participation of rural women as critical agents for enhancing agricultural and rural development and food security.**

66. **While an impressive body of legal and policy work has been established to address women's role as an agent of change in the rural economy and as a key producer of the world's food, significant implementation gaps persist. Rural women, including indigenous women, remain underrepresented in formal and informal rural institutions as elected officials, civil servants, service delivery personnel, or as members of farmers' and community-based organizations. Their knowledge, experiences and contributions are still not sufficiently taken into consideration in policy development, resource allocation and programmes in all areas of sustainable development.**

67. **Gender-responsive governance requires that all institutional actors integrate a gender perspective in policymaking, implementation and service delivery. Governments at national and local levels have a responsibility to promote livelihoods and empowerment of rural women, in particular through strengthening accountability mechanisms, providing sufficient financial and human resources, and ensuring the proper delivery of public services so as to benefit all rural women. Also needed is special attention to ensuring that the implementation of laws and policies is in compliance with gender-equality goals. It is equally important for the capacity of policymakers, civil servants and service providers, both female and male, to be developed so as to enable them to respond effectively to gender-equality issues.**

68. **Greater participation of women in institutions is a key element in ensuring institutions' responsiveness to women's priorities and needs; in the shaping of policies and programmes; and in determining the manner in which services are provided. Participatory approaches and stakeholder consultations are some of the means of ensuring women's input to policy development and the rules that govern service provision and their feedback in that regard. Through involvement in rural and women's organizations, women articulate their priorities and interests; demand information on public finances; and call for changes in policies and services.**

[55] *Gender in Agriculture Sourcebook*.

[56] See General Assembly resolution 65/1.

[57] *Report of the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, Istanbul, Turkey, 9-13 May 2011* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.11.II.A.1), chap. II.

(a) **With regard to the following areas, the Commission on the Status of Women may wish to call on Governments and other stakeholders to:**

Gender-responsive institutions

(a) **Integrate a gender perspective into all rural governance processes including policymaking, public administration and service delivery;**

(b) **Review, revise, amend or abolish laws and policies that discriminate against rural women;**

(c) **Ensure that strong gender units are in place at senior levels in line ministries, such as ministries of agriculture, and are supported by adequate budgets and the power to ensure that all policies and programmes are gender-sensitive and respond to the priorities and needs of rural women and men;**

(d) **Develop capacity of government officials and service providers to use available mechanisms and tools for the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of gender-sensitive policies, programmes and service delivery;**

(e) **Allocate adequate financial resources within line ministries and local governments to meet rural women's needs, including through applying gender-responsive budgeting and gender analysis in planning and budgeting processes;**

(f) **Develop outreach programmes to ensure that rural women are aware of their rights and the responsibilities of national and local governments, with a view to enabling rural women to hold all duty-bearers to account;**

(g) **Provide all rural women and men with free-of-charge access to personal identification documents (such as identity cards and social security numbers) so that they are recognized as full citizens with equal access to productive assets and services;**

(h) **Enact appropriate legislation and regulatory frameworks to ensure that rural organizations enjoy the right and freedom to operate independently, with particular incentives for rural women to organize themselves;**

Service delivery

(i) **Adopt the social protection floor approach with a gender perspective so as to provide basic social protection for all, and take measures to ensure long-term financial support for basic social protection services in rural areas;**

(j) **Create mechanisms designed to enable rural and women's organizations to hold public and private sector service providers accountable for the accessibility, quality and cost of services provided to women and men in rural areas;**

(k) **Increase the number of women extension agents and provide training on gender-equality issues to both male and female extension agents;**

Participation and leadership

(l) Ensure that rural women participate in key decision-making and budgetary allocation processes at all levels of government and within rural institutions;

(m) Adopt temporary special measures, including the setting of quotas, to improve women's participation in national and local governments, farmers' organizations and cooperatives;

(n) Create a fair and transparent process for the inclusion of women in leadership positions in rural farmers' and other organizations, including by setting concrete targets and timelines;

(o) Target women leaders in both women-only and mixed-membership farmers' organizations for participation in the planning and implementation of agricultural and rural policies and programmes, organize women-only consultations, and provide women-friendly logistics (such as the provision of day-care facilities);

(p) Support rural and women's groups in resource mobilization, advocacy and capacity development aimed at effective participatory processes at the local level;

(q) Encourage and support partnerships among different stakeholders in recognizing and responding comprehensively to the needs and priorities of rural women;

Data

(r) Strengthen the capacity of national statistical offices to systematically collect, analyse and disseminate comparable data disaggregated by sex, age and rural/urban areas, including those collected in household and labour-force surveys, agricultural censuses and population censuses, and develop gender-sensitive indicators to serve as the basis for gender-responsive policy design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation in rural areas.

B. Participants

3. The high-level round table provides an opportunity for high-level representatives of Member States attending the fifty-sixth session of the Commission to engage in dialogue and share experiences and lessons learned. The representatives may include: ministers of women's affairs; ministers of agriculture and rural development; heads of national mechanisms for gender equality; and senior officials from other relevant ministries, such as those of environment, education, labour, trade, industry, science and technology, development, foreign affairs, finance, health and energy, as well as national statistical offices. The round table will be open to other members of the Commission and observers.

C. Timing

4. The high-level round table will be held at United Nations Headquarters in New York on 27 February 2012, from 3 to 6 p.m.

D. Format

5. To allow for interaction among as many participants as possible, the round table will be conducted simultaneously in two parallel meetings on the same theme.

6. The chairs of the two parallel meetings will guide the discussions with a view to promoting the interactive nature of the round table. Interventions shall not exceed three minutes. Speakers will be encouraged to ask questions and offer comments on interventions made during the dialogue. Written statements are strongly discouraged.

7. A senior official from an entity of the United Nations system and a representative of civil society will provide comments at the end of the dialogue. The chairs will then close the meetings.

E. Outcome

8. The outcome of the high-level round table will be presented in a summary by the Chair.

III. Elements for discussion in the high-level round table

A. Background

9. The issues covered in the Commission's priority theme for 2012 have, to different degrees and from particular perspectives and approaches, been part of past intergovernmental discussions and outcomes. The main policy instruments and guidance are summarized below.

10. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women,[1] called upon Governments to formulate and implement policies and programmes that support rural women's role in agriculture and fisheries and natural resource management. The Platform for Action called for Governments to formulate and implement policies and programmes that enhance the access of rural women to productive resources, including land, property and inheritance; financial services; extension and marketing services; decent employment and income-generating activities; technology; and markets. It also encouraged specific economic, social, agricultural and related policies supporting female-headed households.

11. The Platform for Action stressed the need to ensure rural women's access to education and training, health services and infrastructure and called upon Governments to allocate the financial, technical and human resources necessary to develop the agricultural and fishing sectors. It called for the generation and dissemination of data on women's unpaid work and the inclusion of such data in national accounting systems. Greater focus should also be placed on strengthening institutional capacities to improve the effectiveness of anti-poverty programmes directed towards the poorest and most disadvantaged groups of women, including rural women. Another key area is the promotion of producer-owned, market-based cooperatives.

12. The General Assembly, in its resolution S-23/3, acknowledged that the majority of the world's women are subsistence producers and users of environmental resources who play a vital role in providing food security and nutrition. Yet, disproportionate numbers of rural women live in poverty. Governments called for the implementation of gender-sensitive national poverty reduction programmes that guarantee rural women's access to and control over economic resources, including property, finance, credit and traditional savings schemes, information, technology and markets. They stressed the need to integrate gender in agricultural and environmental policies and mechanisms and to ensure that national legislative and administrative reform processes, including those related to land reform, decentralization and reorientation of the economy, promote rural women's rights.

13. To support their efforts, Governments invited the private sector, non-governmental organizations and other civil society actors to review and monitor the impact of health sector reform initiatives on rural women and to ensure that such reforms secure full and equal access to available, affordable and high-quality health care and services for all women, taking into account their diverse needs. They urged regional and international organizations, including the United Nations system, international financial institutions and other actors, to adopt measures to ensure that the work of rural women, especially in the informal sector, is recognized and valued in order to enhance their economic security, their access to and control over resources and credit schemes, services and benefits and their empowerment.

14. During its fiftieth session, in 2011, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women adopted a general statement on rural women in which it called for: integrating gender-sensitive perspectives in rural development

[1] *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annexes I and II.

strategies, policies and programmes; involving rural women in all aspects of policy-making; promoting full employment and decent work; reducing women's labour through infrastructure and technological innovation; and increasing rural women's awareness of their rights.

15. Various agreed conclusions adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women addressed issues related to the situation of rural women. The General Assembly has discussed the improvement of the status of women in rural areas on a biennial basis for many years and has recognized the crucial role of rural women in enhancing agricultural and rural development, ensuring food security and eradicating rural poverty. The Economic and Social Council, in its Ministerial Declaration adopted in 2010, called for concerted action to support rural women's economic empowerment.

16. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women also recognizes the significant role rural women play in ensuring the economic survival of their families through their paid and unpaid work. Article 14 urges States parties to ensure that rural women participate in and benefit equally from rural development by enforcing their right to participate in the elaboration and implementation of development planning at all levels. The Convention calls for rural women's equitable access to adequate health-care facilities, social security programmes, formal and non-formal education and training, including functional literacy and extension services, agricultural credit and loans, marketing facilities and equal treatment in land and agrarian reform, as well as in land resettlement schemes. It advocates for rural women's participation in all community initiatives and their enjoyment of adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply, transport and communications. It also calls for their right to organize self-help groups and cooperatives to obtain equal access to economic opportunities through employment and self-employment.

17. Other key global development frameworks, such as Agenda 21, adopted at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development,[2] the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals (see General Assembly resolution 55/2), the Monterrey Consensus of the International Conference on Financing for Development,[3] the 2005 World Summit Outcome (see resolution 60/1), the outcome of the 2010 High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals (see resolution 65/1), and the Istanbul Programme of Action,[4] have also recognized the need for increased attention to rural development, gender equality and women's empowerment.

[2] *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992*, vol. I, *Resolutions Adopted by the Conference* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigendum), resolution 1, annex II. See chap. 24 of Agenda 21, on global action for women towards sustainable and equitable development.

[3] *Report of the International Conference on Financing for Development, Monterrey, Mexico, 18-22 March 2002* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.02.II.A.7 and corrigendum), chap. I, resolution 1, annex.

[4] Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011-2020, *Report of the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, Istanbul, Turkey, 9-13 May 2011* (United Nations publication, Sales No. 11.II.A.1), chap. II.

B. Discussion guide

18. During the round table, high-level representatives from Member States are expected to focus on actions taken, lessons learned, achievements and good practices, as well as gaps and challenges, with supporting data where available, with respect to implementation at the national level of commitments on the priority theme. The reports of the Secretary General on the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges (E/CN.6/2012/3) and on progress in mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development, implementation and evaluation of national policies and programmes, with a particular focus on the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges (E/CN.6/2012/4) discuss relevant issues related to the priority theme of the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women. The meeting will discuss actions undertaken and results achieved in:

(a) Ensuring that food security and rural women are prioritized in national development plans, poverty reduction strategies, sectoral policies, land reforms and current and future financing on agriculture and rural development. This includes ensuring the availability and analysis of data disaggregated by gender to inform the development of sound national strategies, policies, and programmes;

(b) Expanding rural women's access to economic opportunities and assets, such as land, wage employment, financing, markets and infrastructure, and to essential services. This also involves creating an enabling environment for more sustainable markets and less price volatility;

(c) Reducing the burden of women's unpaid work by providing improved infrastructure, labour-saving and productivity-enhancing technologies, and services that provide care for children, the elderly and the vulnerable in rural areas;

(d) Leveraging rural women's leadership by ensuring their adequate representation and participation at all decision-making levels, including in farmers' organizations and land reform and land allocation committees, and in relevant policy forums on agriculture and rural development.